

**Extending the way – Applications of  
Aikido in Management, Mediation, and  
the Healing Arts**







## Foreword by Donald N. Levine

“I did not invent aikido, I discovered it.” So, we believe, said the Teacher who founded aikido, Morihei Ueshiba. He thought he had discovered a system of practices that was in deep accord with the fundamental energy processes of the universe—an aspect of his thought expounded by one of his most intimate late deshis, Shihan Mitsugi Saotome in the brilliant book, *Aikido and the Harmony of Nature*.

O'Sensei's sense that aikido is a form to be *discovered* lends poignancy to the fact that his own understanding and practice of aikido continued to evolve throughout his life. It began as *aikibujitsu*, his own polished version of the system of martial techniques developed since medieval times and transmitted through his own mentor Sokaku Takeda Sensei. It continued through his conversion of that system to *aikibudo*, which he taught in the 1930s: a system of training in powerful techniques for vanquishing opponents but whose practice was geared to ennobling the character of the practitioner. His teaching of this system continued through 1941, the year that Japan's war against the United States began. It was in that year, writes Gozo Shioda in *Aikido Shugyo*, that O'Sensei turned toward a more spiritual path of development. Shioda Sensei notes that he did not follow O'Sensei's teachings further at that point, and that therefore he proved to be the last of O'sensei's students to be trained as a martial artist: "The concept of Aikido as a martial skill has ended with me".

During the years of inner exile at Iwama, Ueshiba's system, which in 1941 he named aikido, continued to evolve. Its movements came to be inspired increasingly by the principle of attunement between partners. According to recollections of Saotome Sensei, Ueshiba's emphasis on interhuman harmony increased enormously due to two events that occurred in 1945, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the reports from Japanese acquaintances who had been present at the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps. Ueshiba became determined to develop a teaching whose emphasis was altogether contrasted with that of defeating an enemy – "in my aikido there are no enemies," he maintained.

This change was experienced by Hikizutchi sensei when they reunited for the first time after the war in 1948, as he recounts in the video, "The Birth of Aikido." "Help me establish a wholly new approach to budo," O'Sensei pleaded to Hikizutchi at an emotional meeting, "we must expound and promote a budo that is dedicated to the creation of peace." As Motomichi Anno Sensei, Hikizutchi's main deshi and successor at Shingu, recalled in an interview in

1999: "According to O'sensei, *bu* is no longer a matter of fighting; *budo* exists for the purpose of developing good relations among all people... As I listened to O'sensei's teaching, it seemed that Aikido was something unprecedented that O'sensei had newly created out of his training in various classical Japanese martial arts [and] that Aikido has evolved beyond *budo*." And Anno Sensei took the next logical step, affirming that the state of being that O'Sensei sought to cultivate through aikido could be achieved by devoted practice of a number of arts, including calligraphy, flower arranging, tea ceremony, and music. A pithy dictum of O'Sensei's makes this point: "*Aiki waza michi shirube*, Aikido training is but a signpost to the Way."

Many of those who went on to teach aikido continued to teach it as a set of techniques for vanquishing the other, despite the account of aikido as a spiritual path set forth so eloquently in *The Spirit of Aikido*, by Ueshiba's son Kisshomaru Ueshiba, the late Doshu. Nevertheless, three of his deshis, in particular, began to explore pointedly the implications of seeing aikido essentially as a Way, designed to promote harmony in the world.

One of these was Koichi Tohei sensei, O'Sensei's preeminent student after World War II. Tohei's earlier studies with yoga teacher Tempu Nakamura, founder of a practice called Shin Shin Toitsu Do (Way of Mind and Body Coordination), equipped him to enrich aikido pedagogy with practices directly aimed at calming the mind and enhancing the flow of ki. While still the principal instructor at the Hombu dojo he set forth teachings on how to extend these practices beyond the mat in a book first printed in English in 1966, *Aikido in Daily Life*. The organization Tohei later founded to promote these teaching directly, the Ki Society, took as its central motto:

Let us have a universal spirit that loves and protects all creation and helps all things grow and develop.

Tohei Sensei was the first person to introduce the teaching of aikido into the United States, where his influence was profound and extensive, such that the American reception of aikido proved from the outset resonant with the notion that aikido had some palpable connection with daily life. Other sources of ideas for extending aikido's teaching into daily life came from two talented Americans who studied with O'Sensei in the 1960s, Terry Dobson and Robert Nadeau.

The only American to be an *uchi deshi* student with the Founder, Terry Dobson told his junior colleague James Lee that

O'Sensei's mission for him was to spread Aikido around the world and show people how it could be used to create peace in the world.

Accordingly, he developed a range of materials for workshops on conflict management and personal growth. Dobson's first published effort was co-authored with Victor Miller and called *Giving In to Get Your Way*, published in

1978 – and brought with a new title, *Aikido in Everyday Life*, in 1993, just after Dobson's death. The book encouraged people to engage in conflict and to respond to life's inexorable conflicts in ways that avoid fighting back, withdrawal, inaction, and deception in favor of confluent engagement. He continued to grapple with these issues, and prior to his untimely death had worked out the outline of a sequel, which he intended to title *Soft Power: The Resolution of Interpersonal Conflict*. The book would have included centering exercises devised by Koichi Tohei and supplemented by several of Terry's own invention. He envisioned it as a unification of aikido "with the academic discipline of interpersonal communication," wherein the verbal counterparts of aikido responses were realized through a number of "verbal forms." Retrieved by James Lee, these verbal forms are explained in detail and examples given in *Restoring Harmony: A Guide for Managing Conflict in Schools* (Lee, Pulvino, and Perrone, 1998).

The other principal conduit for O'Sensei's idea of aikido as a vehicle for spiritual energy was American Bob Nadeau. Nadeau's teachings ignited an enormous amount of creativity in the extension of aiki ways off the mat. At least five of his students went on to inspire countless others with fresh manifestations of extension work: George Leonard, who developed a systematic form of energy training he calls LET (Leonard Energy Training); Paul Linden, who created a healing modality known as Being in Movement<sup>®</sup>; Richard Moon, who focused on powers of empathy through his Listening Institute; Wendy Palmer, who created Conscious Embodiment, a system of practices designed to enhance inner awareness; and Richard Strozzi-Heckler, who fused somatic training with psychotherapy and then forged a somatically grounded approach to leadership training. All five of these published considerably. In particular, one might mention Strozzi-Heckler's influential anthology, *Aikido and the New Warrior* (198 ), which assembled writings by aikidoka who applied the practice in various domains, including family therapy, sports, and playing with animals. A later book, *In Search of the Warrior Spirit*, documents his efforts to engage professional soldiers in aikido ways, and *The Leadership Dojo* bases management strength on integral body awareness.

Aware of these disparate efforts, and of others practitioners who on their own had attempted to use aikido movements and ideas in areas outside of conventional dojo settings, I thought it might be of value to organize a little network to create and enhance communication among them. During a semester teaching in Berkeley in the spring of 1998, I discussed the idea with longtime sempais Wendy Palmer and Philip Emminger. Later that year I clapped, expecting that at least a dozen or two would clap back. They did. In October 1999, after frustrating legal delays and the like, we incorporated formally in the

State of Delaware as Aiki Extensions, Inc. An initial founding membership consisted of about twenty Americans, including all those named above (Lee, Leonard, Linden, Moon, Strozzi-Heckler as well as Emminger and Palmer).

During those months of gestation I was pleased to discover a publication by Peter Schettgen and invited him to join the network. The first aikidoka outside North America to join the group, Peter served on the AE Board of Director for several years, attended the first three Aiki Extensions conferences in the U.S., and organized a series of conferences in Germany. The first two of these resulted in a path-breaking collection of articles, *Heilen Statt Hauen (Heal Don't Hack!)* and *Kreativität statt Kampf (Creativity instead of Conflict)*.

The growth of Aiki Extensions work in Germany has been phenomenal. During the past year the same has been true in Great Britain, thanks largely to the efforts of AE project director Mark Walsh. At this point AE is clearly an international effort, with members in some twenty-seven countries in six continents. Its pioneering activities include a number of pioneering forms of youth outreach, including a center for favela youngsters in Sao Paulo, Brazil; the Bronx Peace Village in New York; weekend gasshukus for kids and a program at the Seven Tepees Youth Center in the Bay Area, California; and a Peace Dojo that forms part of the Awassa Youth Campus in Ethiopia. Its most ambitious project was a four-day international seminar at Nicosia, Cyprus, in April 2005, from which has sprung a variety of continuing efforts to build bridges among Arabs and Israelis.

With the passing of so many of the first generation of direct students of the Founder of aikido, the whole question of the future of this distinctive international movement comes into question. There are those who say that its social and spiritual dimensions represent the most enduring and valuable aspects of aikido practice. Indeed, AE Director Strozzi-Heckler writes that Aiki Extensions is “the 21<sup>st</sup>-century iteration of how O’Sensei envisioned aikido’s role in global peace. AE is in a direct lineage to his vision and it is thus playing out what his vision projected in a world marked by transforming technologies and new epidemics of strife.”

Prof. Dr. Donald Levine

(President of Aiki Extensions Inc., University of Chicago, Ill., USA)

Chicago, June 2007

## Foreword by the Editors

To practice Aikido on the mat is one thing. To use it in the world is another. As Aikido was conceived and handed down by O'Sensei Morihei Uyeshiba, it was more than just a set of techniques one could study and use in the dojo:

Aiki is not a technique to fight with or defeat the enemy. It is the way to reconcile the world and make human beings one family. (Uyeshiba, K., *Aikido*, Tokyo, Hozansha Publishing Co., 1969, p. 177)

Therefore, the real world is the dojo in which we have to practice Aikido, and that means extending the principles of Aikido beyond the practice mat to the social and environmental dojo of our planet.

At the end of 1970, the first pioneers of Aiki Extensions started to use Aikido in settings and contexts outside of the usual dojo. For example, Terry Dobson, an original uchideshi (pupil) of O'Sensei Uyeshiba, and Victor Miller, a well-known teacher of theatre games and an excellent screenplay writer, presented their first workshops on "Verbal Aikido". In 1977, they published their remarkable book "Aikido in Everyday Life – Giving in to Get Your Way" (latest edition: 1993, North Atlantic Books, Berkeley, Cal.). In it, they described their experiences and results with Aikido in the field of conflict management. Several years later, in 1984, Chris Thorsen and Richard Moon established "Quantum Edge" as their Aikido-based approach to leadership and the liberation of the human spirit. Another early Aikidoka to move beyond the walls of the dojo was Thomas Crum with his book "The Magic of Conflict". Without the spirit and the efforts of these pioneers, Aiki Extensions would never have grown into an influential movement with spreading effects.

In September 1998, Aiki Extensions Inc. was founded to support and enhance communication among those Aikidoka who apply the practice and principles of aikido in venues outside of conventional dojo settings. Generally speaking, there are three different directions in which Aiki Extensions has moved:

- 1) Providing traditional Aikido practice in non-traditional settings, i.e. settings that are closer to where the participants actually live (e.g., high schools, churches, hospitals, detention centers, recreation centers, youth centers);
- 2) Using selected Aikido exercises and movement patterns to convey certain ideas which are related to other frames or contexts (e.g., conflict management, stress reduction, emotional intelligence, leadership, motivation); and
- 3) Using Aikido in non-physical forms (the so-called "Verbal Aikido").

By now, Aiki Extensions Inc. has grown into to a powerful non-profit organization which supports projects of Aiki extension work worldwide. Since its foundation by Donald Levine, Professor of Sociology at the University of Chicago and Head of the University of Chicago Aikido Club, several international Aiki Extensions conferences have taken place, one of them in the year 2003 in Germany. Moreover, in Germany two national symposia Aiki Extensions have been hold at the University of Augsburg (2000, 2002), and the latest one has just been conducted in Schweinfurt at the Aiki Institute of Winfried Wagner (2007). The present book is the first international publication of Aiki Extensions, and it describes a broad variety of applications and experiences which have been developed in the United States and in Germany. Therefore, this book is a milestone documenting the approach which has been promoted by Aiki Extensions Inc. since its inception.

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Augsburg, July 2007

## **Contents**

### **A) Aiki Extensions: A Critical Description of Past, Current and Future Projects.**

The Many Dimensions of Aiki Extensions (Donald Levine)

Aikido Roots and Branches - Body Awareness Training Methods and Their Applications in Daily Life (Paul Linden)

Form and Change: Acting as a Path – based on the Example of Aikido and Other Types of Body Work (Martin Gruber)

### **B) Aiki-Ken (Sword-Techniques) in Body- and Psychotherapy**

Aikido Sword Practice in Psychotherapy (Winfried Wagner)

Resolving the Body Schema of Anxiety - Sword training as empowerment for trauma victims (Bertram Wohak)

### **C) Conflict Management and Mediation**

Aikido and Mediation - Ways of Constructive Conflict Solving (Annette Kompa)

Friend or Foe? Aiki Reframing as a Mode of Reality Construction (Peter Schettgen)

## **D) Personal Growth and Social Development**

Preventing Violence and Managing Conflicts –The Path of Aikido and Taekwondo (Ernst Friedrich, Michael Pest, Stephan Daniel Richter, & Gerd Seligmann)

Aikido and Systemic Sculpture Work in Groups and Organizations (David Sikora)

# **A) Aiki Extensions: A Critical Description of Past, Current and Future Projects**

## **The Many Dimensions of Aiki Extensions (Donald Levine)**

1. Aiki Extensions: The Three Modalities
2. Aiki Extensions in Work with Individuals
  - 2.1. Body Work and Somatic Education
  - 2.2. Psychotherapy
  - 2.3. Education
3. Aiki Extensions in Work within and between Groups
  - 3.1. Mediation
  - 3.2. Law Enforcement and Public Safety
  - 3.3. Youth Outreach
4. Extending Aiki Principles in Symbolic Work
5. Connecting the Links of Aiki Extensions

## The Many Dimensions of Aiki Extensions <sup>1</sup> (Donald Levine)

Standing before a sculpture of the Greek god Apollo – a torso only, without head, arms, or feet – Rainer Maria Rilke was overcome with emotion. This fragment, of a god who represented order, harmony, and civilization, radiated a luminous energy that held him in thrall. Beholding the archaic torso, the poet tells us:

. . . da ist keine Stelle  
die dich nicht sieht. Du musst dein Leben ändern.

. . . there is no place at all  
that isn't looking at you. You must change your life.

Entering the aikido dojo, I see the head of an old man with a white beard. There is something in his look, and in the attitude of the people who practice there in his name, that holds me in thrall. Wherever I go in the dojo, I feel: there is no place this man is not looking at me. And I imagine I hear him say: *Du musst dein Leben ändern*. You must change your life.

If I shall have entered the dojo for the first time, I will not have this experience. More likely, I have begun to practice this Japanese martial art of self-defense for a particular personal reason: to gain streetwise confidence, improve my health, impress old friends, meet new friends, who knows what. It is only after I have practiced for a while that the spirit of O'Sensei takes me in, and that my reasons for going there begin to change.

And slowly, I come to realize: what we are working on is not an art, not a set of techniques to accomplish something, but a *practice*, a way of being and acting. Nor is this practice concerned with war, but about promoting *Peace*. Strictly speaking it is not Japanese: its roots are in ancient India and China; it is cultivated and refined in dozens of countries *all over the world*. Nor is it about self-defense, really. Aikido helps one to *transcend the self*, not to firm up the ego. And it is not about *being defensive*, but about connecting with and neutralizing aggression. O'Sensei was a prophet who sought to deal with the chaos and strife of the modern world by promoting order, harmony, and civilized conduct.

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<sup>1</sup> Revised version of talk presented at the Fifth International conference of Aiki Extensions, Inc., University of Augsburg, Germany, July 25, 2003.

This view of aikido could not have been expressed more directly than by the title of a book by André Protin published in Paris in 1977, *Aikido: une art martiale, une autre manière d'être* (*Aikido: A Martial Art, an Alternative Way of Being*). If aikido does indeed represent *an alternative way of being*, then once we come under its spell, we become mindful of an injunction implicit in every moment of our practice: *du musst dein Leben ändern*. We begin to understand what the Founder meant when he said, “Aikido is not about moving your feet, it's about moving your mind.” And how, when he saw advanced students teaching it like some sort of athletic activity he said sadly, like a forsaken prophet, “What they are doing is okay, but that is not what I do.”

O'Sensei reportedly was serious when he claimed that he wanted aikido to function as a medium for bringing peace to the world community; he wanted us to experience the world with compassion and equanimity, and to extend our energy outward in all we do. If that is his message, then are we who follow the practice he created not obliged to consider what we can do to change our lives in that direction?—in everything we do, including our work and social lives?

Several years ago, I became aware of several aikidoka who were struggling to do just that, by taking aikido out of the conventional dojo setting. Most of them were doing so in isolation, unaware that anyone else was following that path. I thought there might be as many as two dozen aikidoka so engaged—using aikido ideas and movements to alter the ways they would practice therapy, or teach, or run a business, or resolve conflicts—and clapped to see if they wanted to connect with one another. Before long, some two hundred aikidoka in seventeen countries had clapped back. The result is Aiki Extensions, and it is now my pleasant task to tell our story.

## 1. Aiki Extensions: The Three Modalities

One way in which we extend aikido practice outside the conventional dojo setting is to provide such practice in settings that are closer to where the participants actually live. This can take place in high schools, churches, hospitals, detention centers, recreation centers, or anywhere else that such practice is approved and safe conditions are present. For example, Steve Ives of San Anselmo, CA, has offered regular aikido classes in the San Rafael Youth Center; members of Aikido Harmonia teach aikido to 7-to-14-year-old in a center for children from the *favelas* (slums) of São Paulo, Brazil; Søren Beaulieu has worked with teen-agers in central city high schools in Philadelphia; and Martha Levenson teaches in middle schools in Seattle.

A second modality of extension work is the use of selected exercise and movements to convey certain ideas. Practitioners might ask novices to

experiment with different physical responses to attacks to experience how the *attacker* feels when the response is counter-attack, or acquiescence, or a neutral off-the-line response. Or they might have students experiment with tight vision and soft vision, to observe the bodily sensations associated with each, and to experience the difference that relaxing the face and eyes makes in the scope of one's visual awareness. Or they might have executives feel the difference by moving a tight restraint with tight versus relaxed muscles.

The third modality is to use aikido ideas purely in non-physical forms. This modality has sometimes been called “verbal aikido.” The late Terry Dobson pioneered this sort of work. Among AE members, Aviv Goldsmith has implemented what prove to be powerful exercises of “verbal aikido.” For example, he has the group form a standing circle, facing inward. Each person takes a turn being in the center (“uke”). Facing each person around the perimeter in turn, uke receives an insult/negative statement of some sort, acknowledging it with a simple “thank you.” In a second, integral round of the practice, the same format is followed by having each participant receive compliments/positive statements.

In a variant of this technique, I emphasize the notion of reframing. First we practice, on the mat, experiencing the difference, when responding to a attack, between perceiving it as threatening, in a defensive state of mind, or as energizing, in a welcoming state of mind. Then I ask them to carry out this exercise non-verbally—with a room-mate, an acquaintance, a work partner, etc.—and write a short report of the reframing experience. Students often report major changes in the quality of the relationship.

## **2. Aiki Extensions in Work with Individuals**

Creative aikidoka have devised a rich repertoire of techniques for conveying insights about centering and how to relate harmoniously with others.

### **2.1. Body Work and Somatic Education**

Much discourse in the teaching of aikido concerns the process of staying centered and re-centering oneself. This theme was verbalized in the teachings of Koichi Tohei sensei, who talked about keeping “one point.” Relatedly, he also tied this process to bodily relaxation and correct posture. These aiki teachings converge with some major developments in Western somatic education, including F. T. Alexander’s work on correcting posture, Ida Rolf’s work on structural integration, and Moshe Feldenkrais’s work on functional integration.

One of the earliest aikidoka to sense the application in aikido practice of explicit body awareness training was Paul Linden, who developed a modality of somatic education he calls Being in Movement® mindbody training. One point of departure for this work was the awareness of what a difference it makes in one's stability when grabbed if one narrows the attention to the grab, instead of being aware of one's whole body. Linden's work utilizes a number of techniques to improve posture, breathing, and related somatic functioning. The set of practices Linden evolved have been used effectively in teaching empowerment to victims of physical or sexual abuse, in teaching somatic self-regulation as a foundation for conflict resolution, and for promoting pain-free computer use or athletic functioning.

Through a system of aikido-inspired practices she calls Conscious Embodiment, Wendy Palmer has developed a series of bodily practices that enable students to enhance intuitive capacity and to identify different modes of experiencing mental attention. Thus, they gain awareness of distinct attentional states (dropped, open, and blended), which serve specific purposes, while they become aware of other attentional states (contracted, ellipted, and split) which are inherently dysfunctional. Palmer employs awareness of one's responses to being led by the hand in different ways to elicit understandings about separation and connection. Her repertoire includes practices that expand understanding of the dynamics of fear, empower the self through becoming more centered, and engage inquiry about ethical choices.

The line between bodywork and psychotherapy is thin to nonexistent. Assignment to one or the other category is often arbitrary, if not counterproductive. Asperger's syndrome (AS) offers one challenge that conspicuously involves both dimensions. Martha Levenson offers aikido practice as therapy to children who suffer from the debilitating social and physical disorder. She has found that through aikido, AS children find creative ways to develop social skills and integrate sensory input, while becoming successful in physical activity.

## **2.2. Psychotherapy**

Numerous aikidoka are professional psychotherapists – more than three dozen in our list of members. Charlie Badenhop has created a practice he calls Seishindo®, which integrates aikido various modalities of psychological growth, including NLP and Ericksonian psychotherapy. Hanna and Günther Buck have had success in utilising aikido-based techniques in clinical work with children, adolescents, and adults who suffer from Attention-Deficit-Hyperactivity-Disorder, and in helping managers in leading positions who often suffer from shadow symptoms of emotional regulation and self-monitoring problems. Scott Evans has taught aikido to groups of disturbed adolescents in a psychological

treatment center, in the course of which the participants improved noticeably in their management of anger, control of anxiety, and relief of depression.

Tim Warneka adapts aiki techniques in clinical work with physically and / or sexually aggressive children and adolescents at an outpatient treatment center. Coming to believe that the degree of awareness concerning affect is directly correlated to the degree of awareness concerning somatic states, he has drawn on Paul Linden's work to create somatic, verbal, and combined exercises for this population. Thus, with adolescents who are “up against” the legal system for their offenses, he might have them stand up and push against a brick wall as a way to demonstrate the level of force they were trying to push against. This would lead to talk about ways to get around the brick wall instead of trying to GO THROUGH IT and then help the teen identify ways to blend and enter and do *tenkan* with their present situation.

In work with substance abusers, Steve Schuh has used an “aiki-focused” counseling approach to help recovering people face their addictions. In group and individual therapy sessions, Steve has used simple aikido techniques to demonstrate recovery principles including how to “blend” with obstacles on the path of recovery. Learning how to center and breath properly is paramount in reducing stress, a key component in many relapses to substance use. Steve helps patients to physically experience handling anger and other difficult emotional states by having them pair up and do blending exercises. By learning how to connect physically with a partner who represents a negative emotional state, the patient regains a locus of control over the “roller-coaster” ride of emotions that surface in recovery. Steve has also designed and implemented a wellness component in a substance abuse residential treatment center that featured aikido exercises and partner practices.

In *Dynamic Counseling* (1994), Jim Lee compiled exercises with themes from Morita Therapy, Naikan Therapy, and other mind-body modalities as well as aikido. Jim draws on ki development ideas to train therapists to “join,” “lead,” “connect,” and “maneuver” clients for more harmonious outcomes. His exercises include: Being Centered in Relationships, Feedback and Centering, Aligning and Moving with Gravity, and Mind and Body Are One.

### **2.3. Education**

Aikido affords a number of techniques that benefit academic work, including the ways students read and write, how they and the instructor relate to each other, and how they relate to one another in the classroom. Jim Lee has applied aikido methods to test students on the final exam of a counseling skills course: in randori style, students were “attacked” randomly with orders to perform particular counseling techniques called out by group peers. Jim Lee has applied

aikido methods to test students on the final exam of a counseling skills course: in randori style in groups of 8. Students took turns being in the middle and were “attacked” randomly by reading client statements with orders to perform particular counseling techniques called out by Jim.

Aiki ideas assist the learning process in extra-academic settings as well. Fiona Kelty uses aiki techniques to assist blind people in Dublin, Ireland, to deal confidently and effectively with help and hindrance from strangers.

When teaching my class on Conflict Theory and Aikido (the syllabus can be found at [www.aiki-extensions.org](http://www.aiki-extensions.org)), I treat the academic classroom as itself a dojo. We consider the difference between collaborative and competitive learning, and explore what it means to read a text, write a paper, converse with others, and take exams in an aiki manner. I ask students to consider their internal sensations from time to time, and use movements in the class to illustrate or explore certain concepts. On the mat, we use more expansive techniques to illustrate concepts dealt with in the classroom such as social distance, dynamics of escalation, and reciprocal priority.

### **3. Aiki Extensions in Work within and between Groups**

For a long time, aiki extensions work has invigorated the area of organizational and human resources development, bringing fresh resources to questions of leadership and coaching, conflict management, team development, and personal mastery. Pioneers like Terry Dobson and Victor Miller led workshops on conflict management for business executives during the 1980s. Chris Thorsen and Richard Moon created Quantum Edge, an aiki-inspired consulting enterprise that focuses on leadership development and change management in corporate settings. Tom Crum founded Aiki Works, and teaches aiki extensions ideas in management seminars on leadership skills, personal vision, development and change. His popular book, *The Magic of Conflict*, emphasizes the creative “push” conflict management gets by trained aiki responses: centering, connecting, and openness to change (and has been extended to work with children in *Your New Conflict Cookbook*, with Judy Warner). Richard Strozzi-Heckler's Institute offers seminars and in-house projects on how to apply aiki principles to organizations and human resources management. He has recently anthologized pieces by twenty-two authors which explore ways that somatics and aiki practices can enhance creativity in the workplace, *Being Human At Work: Bringing a Somatic Intelligence to Your Professional Life*. A number of AE members in Germany and Poland provide aiki-based consulting groups.

A small library of books and models has emerged in this area, including *Leadership Aikido* (O’Neil 1997), *Corporate Aikido* (Pino 1999), and *The*

*Randori Principles – The Path of Effortless Leadership* (Baum & Hassinger 2002). These provide materials for courses in schools of business that present the systematic transfer of aiki principles to organizational settings. At the University of Augsburg Peter Schettgen teaches such courses using “Aikicom,” i.e., aiki communication for solving verbal disputes through centering, grounding, reframing, and using verbal analogies to the physical irimi-tenkan movement (see his *Der alltägliche Kampf in Organisationen [Everyday Conflicts in Organizations]*, 2000), while at Georgia State University in Atlanta, George Kennedy teaches graduate students in business aikido-based techniques of managing conflict.

This modality of Aiki Extensions work was exemplified by AE founding member Philip Emminger, whose business enterprise reaped great benefits and profitability from adapting aiki methods into his managerial approach, which included holding center with the presence and awareness of a martial artist, yet blending compassionately—and seeing the fulfillment of the needs of others as a benefit to the whole. When a management consultant once approached Philip to hire the consulting firm that he worked for, to adopt their conventional, competitive approach, the aiki-based alternative so impressed the agent that the consultant left his job and came to work for Phil!

### **3.1. Mediation**

Almost by definition, the field of mediation is a natural for aiki practitioners. Donald Saposnek broke fresh ground in this area with his paper on using aikido in family therapy. His book, *Mediating Child Custody Disputes*, which has become the classic text in its field, includes a chapter in which aikido diagrams represent ways of reducing conflict in disputes over child custody. Rod Windle has devised imaginative aiki techniques, including the use of job, to mediate a wide range of civil and domestic disputes, and conflicts with schools.

In the international theatre, Chris Thorsen and Richard Moon have used aiki principles to aid peace processes. In Bosnia, Moon led peace-building work with a group of young people from the various factions in the conflict, while Thorsen carried out similar assignments in Cyprus. By teaching mediators and organizational leaders how to operate with the power of openness and listening, Thorsen and Moon have helped restructure systems so that they will operate more harmoniously and experience less conflict both internally and externally.

Dual American-Israeli citizen Jamie Zimron works with Israelis and Palestinians in Israel and in the US, teaching aiki principles of “Peaceful Power” as part of the Mideast peace process. In 1997 she helped found the Israel Women's Martial Arts Federation, which brings Palestinian girls and women into Jerusalem for training conferences. Despite the ongoing war and media emphasis on violence,

Jamie reports that many people engage in non-violent conflict resolution efforts and co-operative educational and business projects, and that aikido is practiced all over Israel, as well as in Egypt, Jordan and other Arab countries. Her dream is to work with aikidoka throughout the Middle East to create an international peace dojo, Dojo Salaam Shalom.

### **3.2. Law Enforcement and Public Safety**

Aikido has long been used in the training of policemen. Yoshinkan aikido has been taught to Tokyo riot police since 1955. Aikido of diverse schools has been taught to Law Enforcement officers in several countries, including Australia, Canada, Poland, and the Philippines.

Officer Matthew Little of the Chicago Police Department's Education and Training Division has been involved in the training of military and police personnel for over a decade. He applies the principles and doctrine of Aiki not only directly as defensive tactics techniques, but also for principle-based firearms and tactical training. This aiki-based principle-driven training methodology allows officers to resolve violent conflict in a calm and appropriate manner, increasing officer safety and lessening the need for use of debilitating or deadly force.

Three years ago, Richard Heckler introduced a Martial Art program into the U. S. Marine Corps using aiki principles. Dojo have been established in every Marine base in the world, and all current personnel and recruits are required to participate in the program. Heckler envisioned this program both as a way to enhance the effectiveness and ethical comportment of marines, and as a kind of character training that would stand them, and their society, in good stead after discharge. Since its inception, reports continuously come in about how incidents of drunkenness, brawling, drug abuse, and domestic violence have gone down and morale has risen in cases where Marines have been engaged in regular practice of the art. Last year, the results of the Marine Corps Martial Art Program were presented to an appreciative audience of conference of Marine Commandants from all over the world.

### **3.3. Youth Outreach**

An area that is just starting to be developed involves a more proactive approach to extending aiki practice to young people outside conventional settings. For several yeas now, Bill Leicht has headed a Bronx Peace Village/Dojo, where fundamentals of aikido, conflict resolution, meditation and council circle are taught to help inner city children how to live non-violently in high-violence areas. [A slide show on this project was shown after this talk; copies can be ordered for \$10 through Aiki Extensions, via the same method as for payment of

dues and donations.] In Chicago, a Greater Chicago Aikido Youth Project coordinated three different projects for youth, with an eye to reaching out into all high schools in the area. In Providence, RI, aikidoka Michael Werth helped organize a kata-a-thon to promote awareness of martial arts training for nonviolent objectives. Dr. Victor la Cerva has transformed his public health work into a campaign for violence prevention. Working for the state of New Mexico, he makes the rounds of high schools with his interactive message of aiki-based alternatives to violence, a message also conveyed in publications, including *Pathways to Peace: 40 steps to a less violent America*.

## **4. Extending Aiki Principles in Symbolic Work**

### **Theatre, Dance, Music, and Spirituality**

In a dojo built inside a professional school for dance, music, and theater near Munich, Martin Gruber teaches Aikido for Actors, as a way to enhance their resources for dealing with scenic demands as well as promote physical and mental training. Working with actors, dancers and singers in northern California, Pamela Ricard uses aiki-based techniques to help performers stay 'present' and thereby maintain moment-to-moment physical, emotional, and mental awareness in order to create believable characters. Through theatrical practices of creating and developing characters in imaginary scenarios, actors learn to identify with, feel compassion and empathy for another person's point of view—someone whom they might not otherwise feel any affinity. She accompanies this training with some practices grounding and centering training – to help them tolerate the discomforts of conflict so they can stay present more skillfully.

Bill Levine, a jazz pianist and film composer working in Hollywood, experiences aikido as a time-based art, similar to music and dance, which contains improvised phrases of energy. He speaks of playing and composing musical phrases, from beautiful/smooth (spiraling) to dynamic/sharp (entering), more effectively when he applies the discipline, wisdom, and compassion cultivated from the practice of aikido, and of how aikido has enabled him to viscerally feel varying degrees of harmonic tension as sound moves around a tonal center, analogous to the “hara” (center) in aikido.

Jack Susman has found considerable connections between the mysticism of aikido and the mysticism of Judaism. Both in the Shinto-based tradition of kototama and in the kabbalah, the fundamental views of the systems are set forth in a form that is often paradoxical, usually unintelligible, and always surprising. One fascinating connection is in their respective theories of creation: both use a symbol of exhalation to explain the origin of the cosmos.

The activities I've just described represent a small fraction of work going on in many countries by aikidoka who are affiliated with Aiki Extensions, not to mention many hundreds more who are not. For a complete list of members and their activities, see the web site link at <http://www.aiki-extensions.org/affiliates/>, where you may also find links to the various AE members mentioned in these remarks. The network is growing, the work is deepening, and there is no reason not to believe that the aiki spirit may accumulate substantial momentum in the years ahead.

## **5. Connecting the Links of Aiki Extensions**

These areas of application require a good deal of specialized training. Normally, professionals in one domain would have little or nothing to say to those in others. Nevertheless, the fact that all of them are aikidoka, seeking to manifest different dimensions of the Aiki Way, might lead one to think that sooner or later they could develop valuable understandings to exchange with one another.

The work of José Roberto Bueno in Brazil begins to suggest some openings of this sort. To begin with, Bueno organized a program to bring young people from the *favela* to an after-school center for regular classes in aikido taught by volunteers. At the same time, he also teaches aikido to members of an upscale business consulting firm, Amana-Key. Thanks to his own personal networking, the employees of Amana-Key who practice aikido in a small dojo there have become interested in the *favela* project, to the extent that some have become sponsors of the children in the *favela* center and a few have even reached a point of aikido training where they can serve as volunteers in the youth outreach center as well.

And suddenly, the possibilities seem endless. Ask me, I think it is what O'Sensei would have wished.

# **Aikido Roots and Branches: Body Awareness Training Methods and Their Applications in Daily Life (Paul Linden)**

**An Experiential Workshop for the 2002 Conference of the German Aiki  
Extensions**

1. Introduction
2. Fundamental Body Awareness Exercises
  - 2.1. Breathing
  - 2.2. Posture
  - 2.3. Movement Mechanics
  - 2.4. Intentionality
3. Applications
  - 3.1. Music
  - 3.2. Computer Use
  - 3.3. Gardening
  - 3.4. Pregnancy
  - 3.5. Sports
  - 3.6. Children with Attention Disorders
  - 3.7. Sexual Abuse Recovery
  - 3.8. Peacemaking
  - 3.9. Aikido
4. Conclusions

# **Aikido Roots and Branches: Body Awareness Training Methods and Their Applications in Daily Life<sup>1</sup>**

**(Paul Linden)**

**An Experiential Workshop for the 2002 Conference of the German Aiki  
Extensions**

## **1. Introduction**

The other day in my children's Aikido class, I stopped the class and asked a question: "What is the capital of Texas?" Without hesitating, all the kids together shouted out "Hips!" The joke in our class is that all questions in Aikido have the same answer, "hips," and so the kids immediately knew how to answer my question about Texas. In the same way, there are some simple, basic Aikido ideas/processes that can be helpful in answering almost any performance question in any area of life. As a professional body worker, I teach these processes outside of Aikido to a wide variety of people with a broad variety of interests and needs. The essence of these practices is fullness, that is, being present and open in breathing, posture, movement and intentionality. Whatever you do, you will do better if you are present in your body.

The concept of fullness and methods for achieving it are often more implicit than explicit in Aikido. It was in Aikido practice that I had the opportunity to study myself in movement. Aikido was my laboratory for developing and testing my ideas and methods of body awareness training. Aikido pointed me in the direction of fullness. However, the concepts and exercises are generally not brought out in the specific, systematic ways that I need to learn and like to teach. In the end, I had to develop my own training methods. These training methods emphasize breaking complex, global processes down into modular units of exercise and skill acquisition.

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How did I come to these practices? I began practicing Aikido in 1969, and I was pretty awkward when I started. I really wasn't living in my mindbody effectively, and the Aikido techniques were too complex and subtle for me. I gradually realized that I had to study something that was much more basic than the physical defense techniques. I worked out some basic mind/body practices that enabled me to start practicing Aikido more effectively. Then I discovered that those practices helped me improve daily life effectiveness. I eventually found that these practices were helpful to other Aikidoists. And later I started teaching those mindbody practices outside of Aikido and became a professional somatic educator.

As I taught people outside Aikido, I found that the mindbody awareness training methods I had developed are broadly effective in improving action in any area of life. They are based on some simple but far reaching ideas/experiences about how the mindbody functions.

Body alignment (posture) and body use (movement style) are the concrete manifestations of a person's philosophy of self/world/action.

Emotions and perception are physical actions done in the body.

Intentionality is what shapes posture and movement.

The attack/defense interaction is an excellent model for all problematic situations. The common response to a challenge is to constrict, twist and harden the breathing, posture, and movement. This hardening is the somatic action of separateness, isolation, fear, anger, and effort.

It is possible to replace the action of hardening the body with the intention/action of opening the body. Speaking in terms of intentionality (or ki), this would be an expansive, radiant, symmetrical state of intention. Speaking in terms of posture, this would be a vertical state of alignment, with the spinal column and head supported effectively on the pelvis and legs. Speaking in terms of psychology or spirituality, this would be an integration of awareness, power, love, and freedom.

This state of open integrity is the basis for effective thinking and acting in any area of life.

In the workshop for Aiki Extensions, I will show examples of how I have applied these ideas and exercises apply in a number of seemingly different areas of work: music, computer ergonomics, gardening, pregnancy, sports performance, work with children with Attention Deficit Disorder, sexual abuse recovery, and peacemaking. And of course, Aikido teaching itself.

Any one of these applications merits a whole paper to itself, or even a whole book, but I think that a brief survey will make clear how some fundamental

elements can apply to a wide variety of tasks and how Aiki-based mindbody training can be extended into daily life activities. Detailed written descriptions of the techniques of body education that I teach demand a good deal of space, more space than would be appropriate here. For those readers interested in seeing exactly how the techniques are done, the articles and books on my website provide a detailed and extensive description of the somatic education methods I have developed and their applications in various areas of life.

In the next section, in order to give an idea of the methods by which I teach body awareness and effective movement, I will briefly describe examples of some of the fundamental body awareness exercises I use. Efficient body use is the foundation for strain-free, effective movements for task performance and is also the basis for emotional centering and clarity of thinking. The four key elements in the methods I work with are breathing, posture, movement mechanics, and intentionality.

In the third section of the paper, I will go on to show how these methods may be applied in various areas of daily life.

## **2. Fundamental Body Awareness Exercises**

The systematic process of body awareness teaching that I have developed I call Being In Movement® mindbody training (BIM), and it is this which forms the basis of my teaching both in and out of Aikido. BIM is an educational process which uses practical movement experiments to help people learn how to examine the body as the self, and it explores the underlying links between structural/functional efficiency, emotional/spiritual wholeness, and social justice. By examining how breathing, posture, and movement simultaneously *shape* and *are shaped by* thoughts, feelings, and intentions, BIM teaches people how to discover the underlying ideas that rule and restrict their movements and how to develop more effective strategies for action—strategies based on mindbody integrity.

### **2.1. Breathing**

When people confront a difficulty or a challenge, typically their breathing stops. Constricting the breath is a key element in the experience of not being good enough, and breathing more openly is the foundation for efficacy. To teach people fullness of breath, I start by having students stand up and alternate tightening their bellies and letting them plop out. Then I have them release their bellies without doing a preliminary tightening. People generally experience a noticeable release even though they had not first tightened their bellies consciously, and they realize from this that they had been unconsciously holding

themselves tight and that they probably hold themselves tight all the time. I have them touch their bellies and experiment with their breathing until they discover how to drop the movement of inhalation into the pit of their bellies, expanding the belly and the lower back as well as the chest when they inhale. This is just the opposite of the pattern of breathing involved in fear or anger, in which the belly is tightened and the chest elevated during inhalation.

To give people a clear experience of the effect of constricting their breath, I have them stand and resist a light push on the shoulders, first while constricting their breath and then while letting their breathing be soft and full. People readily notice that they are far more stable when they breathe easily. Fear/anger breathing makes one a pushover.

## **2.2. Posture**

Breathing easily is the beginning of the experience of postural stability, which is crucial in developing the feeling of efficacy and ease. I begin working on postural stability by having people feel how straightening up from a slump is accomplished. Most people think that straightening up is done by throwing the shoulders back or by straightening the back, and practically no one notices that the whole process is built around pelvic rotation. When the pelvis rotates backward (the direction in which the guts in the pelvic bowl would spill out over the back edge of the pelvis), the stack of vertebrae has no foundation on which to rest and it slumps down. Rotating the pelvis forward—in the appropriate way—provides a foundation for the spinal column and the torso as a whole and creates upright posture.

Most people rotate the pelvis forward by using the superficial muscles in the back to pull upward on the rear edge of the pelvis. I have students experience this by pulling their shoulder blades and back pockets together, and they feel how their backs arch and their postures become tense and top heavy.

To find the more effective way of coming to an upright sitting posture, I ask students to slump and notice that when they do, the pubic symphysis (the bone in front of the pelvis, just above the genitals) points upwards. The more appropriate way to rotate the pelvis forward involves moving the pubic symphysis forward and down so that it points toward the floor. This uses the iliacus and psoas muscles (which are muscles deep in the front of the body) to do the movement. This new sitting posture creates an effortless stability and a physical sensation of exhilaration and power, which is the opposite of the constriction produced by weakness and inability.

The next step in the development of postural stability is rather surprising to most people, and that is the development of a loving heart. I help people understand this by asking them to imagine a situation in which they have to deal with a boss

who is antagonistic, critical, and disrespectful, and I have them note the physical changes they experience. Generally people feel tension in the chest and shortening of the breath as well as other tensions throughout the body. Then I have people imagine someone or something that makes their heart smile. This not only reverses the changes created by imagining the uncomfortable situation but also produces sensations of relaxation, warmth, softness and openness in the chest.<sup>2</sup> These sensations of being “warm-hearted” are the bodily manifestations of love. Not only does the chest soften, but the whole body becomes freer and more unified, and this improves body use and the coordinated delivery of power in any action. Of course, making love part of power also ensures that power will be used wisely and constructively.

Power and love, contrary to the model that our culture uses, really are inseparable. Love without power is limp and ineffective, and power without love is rigid and harsh. (Here I am using the terms with their more usual meanings, as though they were in fact separable.) In either case, love or power is diminished to the point where it becomes just a shadow and not true power or love at all. Power is the foundation for the ability to love, and love is the foundation for the wise use of power. This is not mere philosophy but is simply a shorthand method of stating that the body and the self must be soft and receptive as well as integrated and strong in order to function well.

### 2.3. Movement Mechanics



Postural stability is the foundation of the ability to move with power and grace. Walking offers a convenient place to begin the study of movement since the movements of walking are fundamental parts of many other activities.

To develop people's awareness of an efficient walking gait, I have them stand and push on a wall, with their feet far enough from the wall that their bodies incline forward quite a bit. Usually people believe that they push on the wall with their arms and shoulders, and they don't notice the contribution of the legs and hips. One way of clarifying this is to have them bend their knees quite a bit and then straighten their legs rapidly as

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<sup>2</sup> I learned this exercise from Stephen Levine, who works with meditations on the heart. See his book *Who Dies? Conscious Living and Conscious Dying*. Anchor Books. Garden City: 1982.

though they were trying to push the floor backwards away from the wall. As they do this, they experience that the force transmitted to the wall by their hands increases. This helps them begin to understand that the traction of the feet on the floor and the shove back and down with the legs is what creates the forward shove on the wall. This realization transforms their awareness so that they experience the lower half of their bodies as active and powerful.

Having students walk with this new awareness transforms their walking. Having them step forward using an exaggerated pressing down and back with the ball of the back foot gives them a new experience of walking. The back/down energy reflects off the floor into a forward/up movement of the body. They have a ground to stand on, a foundation for themselves. Their posture opens upward. Their walk becomes more erect, clearer and more energetic. People often conceive of walking as falling down onto their forward foot, rather than springing up off their back foot, but when they walk that way, they sag and fall downward. Their energy droops. The new way of moving is mechanically more efficient and powerful. It is also much more confident and alert.

The goal and the result of the exercises in breathing, posture, and movement mechanics is to help people experience the nature of true power in the body. True power is soft, fluid, focused, and loving. Walking while paying attention to breathing, posture, use of the legs, and heartfulness is a way of practicing a state of completeness and wholeness.

## 2.4. Intentionality

Another element of the process of developing empowerment and wholeness has to do with intentionality. Intention is the process that shapes posture, movement, and action. Helping people directly experience the intentional foundations of their actions is a way of both moving them to take responsibility for their responses and showing them how to improve their responses.

To create an operational definition of “intention,” I put something, a pencil for example, down about three meters in front of a student and I instruct her/him to want it. I ask the student to actually *intend* to go over and get the pencil. It must be an authentic wanting. It must be felt in the body.

“Wanting” does not mean either *just thinking about* or *actually going* and getting the pencil. It is a sincere somatic sensation of desire. Most people can create an authentic feeling of wanting when they focus on it, though many need some personal guidance to home in on it. What I’m after is just letting the body experience the wanting and react to it naturally and spontaneously.

Once people can establish this feeling, they usually feel themselves “involuntarily” tipping toward the pencil. For most people, this movement will

be a small drift toward the pencil, perhaps a third of a centimeter or so, though some people will actually move quite a bit. Most people will feel as though the pencil were a magnet gently drawing them towards it. (Some people will move away from the pencil, which usually is an expression of some need to reject their own desires).

When you have an image of a movement and intend to execute the movement, your brain sends nerve impulses to the muscles which will do the movement. The muscles can act with a range of force, from a barely perceptible tensing to an all-out clenching. However, even below the range of what is barely perceptible to most people, there is still physical activity, the faintest stirrings of the muscles. You could call these faint, normally imperceptible tensings “micromovements.” All you have to do is wish to begin moving in some direction and your body will begin to do that movement, either at a microlevel or in larger, more obvious ways.

The pencil-wanting exercise is a way to help people begin to feel and notice the micromovements which are the small beginnings of the action of going to get the pencil. The point of helping people notice this unbroken continuum from thought to movement is to give them a clear realization that there is no separation between the mind and the body. Intending something is the beginning of doing it. And underlying every action, is the intent to do that action, though people are not often aware of the volitional foundations of their actions. (To be more precise, every complex action has an intentional foundation. Simple reflex movements do not arise from intentions.) Experiencing the intentional foundations of action moves people in the direction of taking responsibility for the things they do.

Beyond that, working on the subtle level of intentionality (in addition to the more obvious elements of breath, posture, and movement) is helpful in replacing ineffective actions with more effective ones. By noticing the first faint stirrings of the decisions to execute habitual, ineffective actions, and replacing them with the intentions to execute more effective actions, people can practice and learn better response habits.

Underlying all the work I do on breath, posture, movement mechanics is an ideal which describes optimal intentional functioning. As a general rule, we function most effectively when the mindbody is in a symmetrical, expansive state.

The Six Directions Breathing exercise is a way of practicing the intention of expansiveness. I have people sit quietly with their eyes shut. First they adjust their posture and breathing. Next they inhale into the core of their body just below the navel. And as they exhale, they employ a regular progression of directing their breath outward into the six cardinal directions. Breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth, with one breath for each directional

focus, they gently exhale down, up, right, left, forward, backward, and then they exhale in all six directions at once.

This exercise is a way of practicing keeping an open, even, symmetrical, expansive awareness of the whole body. More than that, it is a way of contacting the feeling of being fully in the world. Any fear, anger, helplessness etc. produces dim spots or twists and asymmetries in the feeling of the body's field of energy/attention. Finding those gaps in the field and breathing life back into them is a way of remembering to live fully in the body, in the present, in the world. One can do the exercise projecting simultaneously from the heart as well as the belly, enlarging the focus to include love as well as power.

This breathing exercise is helpful because it gives people a sense of the fundamental level at which choice or intention operates to structure the body and behavior. It gives them a tool for practicing different ways of being. And as they build up skill with this tool, they can use it unobtrusively during challenging situations to interrupt old patterns and substitute new, more effective ones.

### **3. Applications**

The work with breathing, posture, movement, and intentionality combine to create the mindbody state of fullness. This section on applications of body awareness training will show how that state of fullness can be applied in various areas. We will start with simple postural work and move on to work with developmental and emotional difficulties. These may seem like radically different topics, but from the perspective which sees the human being as a somatic whole, these topics are fundamentally much the same and can be addressed by attending to mindbody wholeness and fullness.

Postural, psychological, spiritual and task performance issues form an indivisible whole. Even a very simple physical problem may have elements of emotional and spiritual difficulties hidden within it. For example, perhaps the reason that a person locks their hips when they run is that they were sexually abused as a child and maintain continuously high level of tension in their pelvis. It is often the case that without resolving an emotional element, a physical task that the student wants to improve cannot be changed. By the same token, if a student wants to resolve some emotional or spiritual difficulty, the body posture which is the physical expression of that difficulty must first be loosened and changed to allow psychospiritual change to begin. The body state of freedom and balance is the concrete extension of the emotional and spiritual state of wholeness and peace.

### 3.1. Music

These two photos of a flute player show her initial playing posture (photo #1) and her posture at the end of her third lesson (photo #2). I have found this same slumped posture in violinists, pianists, potters, dentists, computer users and other people who work in a sitting position.

To feel how slumping affects movement efficiency, try slumping down, raising your arms, and moving them around. Next, roll your pelvis forward to bring yourself up to a more upright sitting position, and try moving your arms around again. It is easy to feel how slumping restricts the breathing and makes moving your arms more effortful. Sitting upright allows greater ease and efficiency in postural support. It is impossible to convey in this printed paper the wonderful improvement in sound that results when a musician uses her or his body with more efficiency.



(No. 1)



(No. 2)

The flute player had a relatively simple problem. However, very often what looks like a simple postural problem can involve significant layers of hidden meaning. I once worked with a jazz pianist who came for lessons because of disabling pain in his right arm as he played. The lessons involved a fascinating interweaving of work with the pianist's body mechanics and work with the emotional, cultural and philosophical meanings that underlay his body mechanics.

At the beginning of our first lesson, I noticed that the pianist's left shoulder was higher than his right and that his left leg was used more for weight support. When he played, he sat hunched over the keyboard. I decided to focus our lessons on how to sit at the piano in a relaxed, balanced, and upright posture. After I showed him the posturally free way to sit upright, he realized that he

created excess tension in many of his movements in an attempt to be strong and tough. This idea that strength is tough and hard is, of course, very common in our culture. When I showed him how to use softness as a foundation for strength, he began to feel less pain as he played.

At the beginning of one lesson, I noticed that when he really got into the music, he hunched himself down over the keys just as he had done when I first saw him. When I asked him about it, he said that he didn't like playing with his head upright and his body open because, as a jazz pianist, he often played in bars. People in the audience were frequently drunk and unpleasant, and his overwhelming desire was to go into himself, the piano, and the music and create a barrier between himself and his audience. By showing him how soft strength could be a foundation for effective boundary control, I helped the pianist experience that openness and vulnerability were a better defense than hardness and defensiveness.

In a further lesson, he said that the posture of hunching over the piano, getting into the keyboard, was part of the way jazz pianists played. He explained that it had to do with the essential process of jazz improvisation. Because he had no written down, preordained piece of music to play, he couldn't go in with a plan but had to throw himself on the mercy of the moment. The pianist said he leaned close to the instrument to get himself into it, directing his attention away from the sounds of the room and into the sound of the piano. He was trying to find the next notes he was going to play, focusing on the instrument as the crucial source for the next musical thought.

I pointed out that his musical thoughts actually came from deep within himself. However, in locating the source of musical thought in the instrument, he to some extent lost his experience of his inward self. To play with an erect posture, he needed to readjust his very idea of what it was to think. Once he was able to create the new physical posture as a foundation for thinking, he was able to access new power and sensitivity in the creative process. In addition, the new shape reduced the strain on his arm.

### 3.2. Computer Use

This section on computer use illustrates one example of how body awareness training can be applied in business and industry. I have also done numerous presentations to massage therapists on strain-free ways of delivering massages, and I have taught factory assembly line workers how to move in ways that reduce strain and fatigue. In a seemingly very different



business application, I have also done presentations for businesses on the topic of conflict resolution, which, as you will read later, begins with finding a balanced posture.

It is evident that the same upright sitting posture shown with the flutist is important in computer use. If you spend hours sitting at a computer, and you are not sitting with the weight of your body falling squarely onto your chair, you are putting considerable strain into your muscles and joints.

The workstation design and setup are based on body awareness. The chair height is equal to the length of the lower legs plus the thickness of the shoe soles. With that height, the thighs and pelvis are free and balanced. The chair is padded but not soft and squishy; it provides solid support for the body. Note also that the seat pan is flat and tilted very slightly forward. If it were bucket-shaped and tilted back, as is common, the pelvis would be tipped back rather than level and the spinal column would not be supported well.

Once the chair supports the body appropriately, the rest of the workstation can be determined. The arms should be bent at the elbows; if the arms were extended, that would increase the weight the shoulder muscles would have to hold up. Once the elbows are bent, that determines the height of the desk surface and the distance the chair should be from the desk. In a nutshell, the keyboard should be positioned right under the hands; the hands should never have to reach for the keyboard. Likewise, the monitor should be positioned where the gaze falls naturally; the head should never have to adjust to the monitor position. Since the usual keyboard has cursor control keys and the number pad on the right, the mouse should be on the left (for ordinary point and click activities). Putting the mouse on the right means holding the right arm extended away from the body, and that will produce significant strain.

I have written a book titled *Comfort at Your Computer: Body Awareness Training for Pain-Free Computer Use*. The book has a lot more information about safe computer use, including such things as how to use standing computer workstations and laptops. The key is body awareness. Once you know how to place your body in a state of balance, ease, power, and freedom, then you will be able to figure out a workstation design which will support your body in maintaining that physical integrity.

### 3.3. Gardening



O'Sensei practiced Aikido and farmed. I have been practicing Aikido and organic gardening for over thirty years, and within a short time of beginning Aikido, I started thinking about how to apply Aikido movements to gardening chores. An early article that I published on Aiki extensions work was an article I wrote in 1978 on gardening.

The first photo shows the way people typically hoe. They use the arms and back to generate movement and guide the hoe.

*(No. 1)*

However, the arms are relatively weak and the back will be subject to strain. In addition, this posture compresses the breathing, which will add to the physical discomfort. Notice also that my awareness is visibly restricted to the top half of my body and the narrow segment of the world taken up by the hoe and my target.

Think back to the four body awareness themes that I discussed earlier. Because space is limited, I cannot go into full details about how I teach fullness as the foundation for powerful, efficient, strain-free hoeing. However, generally speaking, the body should be well-aligned, with full breathing, and power being generated by the legs and hips. There should be a balanced and open awareness of the self in space. In particular, using the hoe makes use of the rowing exercise and is very much like using the Aiki jo (four foot staff).

For greater clarity in the photos, I'm using the hoeing movement I'd adopt if I were chopping through a particularly stubborn weed with thick, strong roots. Hoeing ordinary smaller weeds would use the same movements but in a lighter, shorter form.

Having raised my hoe (photo #2), I'm supporting its weight with my legs and hips. Notice that my upper torso and arms are placed directly above my pelvis and legs. Notice also that my awareness is much more evenly dispersed throughout my whole body and the environment around me.



In photo #3, I have finished the chopping motion with the hoe, and it is clear that the power comes from the forward weight transfer movement of the legs and pelvis combined with the vertical downward movement of the arms. This is derived from the Aikido rowing exercise, but it also makes use of the openness and expansiveness of breath, body, posture, and movement that I described earlier in this paper.

*(No. 2)*

The fourth photograph shows the pull back that comes at the last moment of the chopping action and which serves to pull on and move whatever is being chopped. This movement too is part of the rowing exercise, and successful execution of the movement depends on opening and balancing the body.

The fundamental principles of balanced body use apply to any gardening chore from weeding to wheeling a wheelbarrow. Beyond that, the same educational approach applies to any daily activity, from washing dishes to driving a car.



*(No. 3)*



*(No. 4)*

### 3.4. Pregnancy

During pregnancy, many women feel a lot of discomfort. Their backs ache, and they waddle when they walk. Yet most of the discomfort can be eliminated with some brief instruction in body and movement awareness (providing that the discomfort doesn't stem from some medical problem). I usually start by teaching pregnant women how to balance the pelvis in sitting. This new awareness of pelvic balance can then be extended into larger movements such as standing, walking and doing chores.

Standing presents some unique challenges to pregnant women since the increasing weight of the developing baby exerts a strong tug on their postures. As the fetus grows, a pregnant woman's body weight shifts forward, and most often the expectant mother throws her shoulders back to balance the weight of the fetus. She creates the characteristic pregnant swayback posture as a means of handling the weight hanging off her forward edge. This increased curve makes the woman's posture biomechanically weaker and contributes to low back pain and the awkward, strained pregnant waddle. However, it is easy to change this, as shown by the fact that all the accompanying photographs of the pregnant woman were taken during the course of one one-hour lesson.

To show how to balance the tug, I work with how to best hold a weight at arm's length out in front of the body. When most people do this, they counterbalance the forward and down force of the weight by leaning their head and shoulders back, as shown in the first photograph. However, that creates a swayback curve which compresses the lower back. It also prevents the efficient use of the legs for thrusting to the rear during walking, which is why pregnant women waddle.



(No. 1)



(No. 2)

Instead, sticking the tailbone slightly back and out allows the pelvis and lower torso rather than the shoulders and upper torso to act as the counterbalance to the

forward weight (photo #2). This opens and lengthens the back and frees up the hips and legs. It also allows the weight to be supported by the leg muscles rather than by the back. All this results in much easier and stronger standing posture as well as a more efficient and comfortable walking gait.

Along with postural improvement in the relatively simple actions of sitting, standing and walking, it is also necessary for pregnant women to learn to apply balanced movement mechanics in the more complex movements of daily chores. This can be anything from using a computer, to lifting children, to driving a car, to vacuuming.

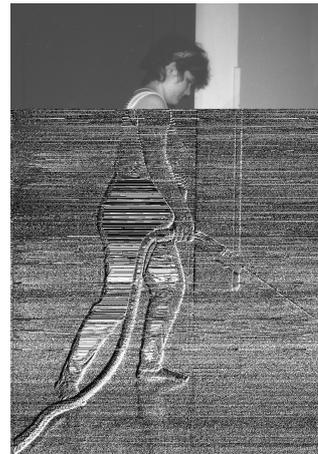
Notice that the first vacuuming photograph (photo #3) is very similar to the incorrect hoeing photograph. In both photos, the mover is bent forward. This is a common movement pattern. Most people in our culture move from their shoulders, arms, and backs. And just as in correct hoeing, the strain-free movement (photos #4 and 5), derives from the Aikido rowing exercise. By making use of the legs to shift the weight of torso, the vacuum cleaner is moved forward and backward, and the back is spared the effort and strain.



(No. 3)



(No. 4)



(No. 5)

Without going into detail, I also teach pregnant women ways of dealing with the pain of labor. The natural urge is to brace against and withdraw from pain, thus constricting breathing and awareness; but by maintaining soft breathing and body expansiveness, women can reduce pain and become more comfortable with pain they cannot avoid.

It is not necessary for pregnancy to be so uncomfortable. It is relatively easy for most pregnant women to learn how to use body awareness to create comfort. Body and movement awareness education is very important (along with exercise programs and childbirth classes) for a safe and comfortable experience of pregnancy.

### 3.5. Sports

I've worked with runners, swimmers, golfers, tennis players, weight lifters, baseball players, volleyball players, bicyclists, and so on. The key to effective performance is always openness and balance of the body and the perceptual/intentional field.

Here I will examine golf as an example of how the Aiki-based body training I have developed can be applied to sports. The first two photos show how the golfer was accustomed to playing before she started lessons with me. Note how as she addresses the ball her arms and legs are stiff and her awareness is confined to her shoulder area and the ball. This is even more apparent in the way she swings her golf club. She ignores her legs and hips and swings from her waist, shoulders, and arms. Actually this is very similar to the photo of me hoeing in the incorrect manner. The over-use of shoulders and arms, and the location of awareness high in the body form a fundamental movement style that is encouraged by the Euro-American culture.



*(No. 1)*



*(No. 2)*

In the third photo, she has changed the way she addresses the ball. Her elbows and knees are bent a bit, which relaxes and frees up her chest, back, and hips. I hope that it will be evident in the photo that she is now breathing more fully and paying more attention to her whole body. She is standing in her feet and feeling the ground, which will allow her to raise the club and swing more effectively. (Her form may not be standard golf form, but everyone who has tried this freer form has been surprised to find that it is more comfortable and more effective than the standard.)



(No. 3)



(No. 4)



(No. 5)



(No. 6)

It is clear in the motion of the swing (photos #4 and 5) and the follow through (#6) that the golfer is more balanced and free in her posture, more fluid in her movements, and more expansive in her awareness.

In the last couple of years, I have been working more and more with children with Attention Deficit Disorder and Asperger's Syndrome. In both of these developmental disorders, children have a hard time focusing themselves and controlling their reactions to environmental distractions. Inattention and impulsivity are common, as are inability to remain attentive to a task and inability to control impulses. Asperger's also includes a component of reduced awareness of non-verbal communication and social cues.

Part of what ordinarily makes it difficult to teach concentration is that it is usually thought of and experienced as a seamless, mental process. How do you

learn to concentrate? Well, you just put your mind on something. However, that kind of languaging *names* the process but doesn't explain how to do it, and so someone who cannot naturally focus does not benefit from such an instruction. The key to teaching the skill of concentration is to reframe it as a somatic process and break that somatic process down into small, concrete learning steps.

I generally see children with attention problems for three to five one-hour sessions. That is usually enough to teach them the focusing and self-regulation techniques that I have developed. Many children move into my children's Aikido classes after the series of private lessons. The private sessions are much quieter and less complex an environment than an Aikido class with fifteen children, and so kids with attention problems find private lessons much easier as a starting point. The Aikido classes offer them a way to continue practicing self-regulation and focusing.

One exercise that I use with most children is the Anti-Tickle Technique. I start by explaining the exercise to the child, asking permission to do it, and explaining that they can tell me to stop at any moment and I will do so. Then I tickle them. Of course, the kids usually find themselves convulsed with laughter and helpless.

Then I go through the exercises on breathing and sitting. Of course, I teach them in a simple, fun way appropriate to children. Along the way, I show the children how physical relaxation and postural stability improve running, throwing a ball, and so on. Then we go back to the tickling, and the kids discover that by staying in the relaxed, stable, expansive somatic state, they can become non-ticklish. That example of their capacity to focus and thereby achieve interesting results is very surprising to the children (and their parents) and very motivating. They realize that they can do more than they ever thought, and success at controlling their hitherto out-of-control inner world is very satisfying.

That usually takes me two lessons, and often in the third lesson I will have the children practice reading. They usually experience that by focusing on the body state of fullness, they can read much more easily, even when I try to distract them by throwing tissues at them, tickling them, or talking to them.

In addition to work with attention, I have worked with children on issues of anger management, conflict resolution, physical coordination, and anxiety. In my teaching, I simply don't make any distinction between "physical" and "mental" issues. Because I address the whole person as a process of simultaneous physical and mental experiencing and feeling, I can work with a broad range of issues and attain rapid results.

### 3.6. Sexual Abuse Recovery

Since 1987, most of the clients who have come to me for body education sessions have been adult survivors of child abuse. As a somatic educator and martial artist, I focus on a very body-oriented and practical view of the core problem in abuse. In my work, I have seen over and over again how issues of powerlessness and lack of safety play out in the bodies of people who have been abused, and I have seen how healing it is to help people learn to live more fully in their bodies and on that basis create effective boundaries. (Though my focus in this section is on abuse, I should say that the body education processes I will describe are effective with other forms of trauma such as car crashes and surgery. They are also effective with conditions such as fibromyalgia that have a significant anxiety component.)

From my perspective, the crucial issue in abuse is the learning that takes place during abuse. When someone is abused, whether physically, sexually or emotionally/verbally, they learn that they are profoundly powerless, powerless to control their bodies and their environment and create safety. That sense of powerlessness becomes a core element in their self-identity, and many of the symptoms of trauma such as dissociation, drug abuse, body numbness, or acting out involve some feeling/belief on the part of the survivor that they cannot create safety.

I would define the *trauma response* as a physical behavior pattern. Expressed most simply, the core trauma response is to tighten and twist the body. This is generally expressed in tense breathing, tight muscles, constricted posture, stiff movements, and narrowed attention. In a paradoxical way, tightness can often include limpness as well, and this is expressed in states of body numbness or dissociation. The trauma response becomes a fundamental part of the trauma survivor's learned body style and is maintained as a learned behavior until new learning replaces it.

The trauma response often functions as a way of reducing awareness, as a form of anesthesia. When there is nothing practical that can be done to control a threat, then anesthesia offers a means of tolerating it. However, as Aikidoka, we have experienced very clearly that the power to fight an attack or escape from it comes from relaxed, balanced movement and clear awareness. The normal shock responses of muscular constriction or mental dissociation lead not to effective protective action but instead to mindbody weakness and ineffective action.

The problem for abuse survivors is that powerlessness and the trauma response, once experienced and incorporated into the self-identity, lead to a vicious circle. When adults live life on the basis of feelings of powerlessness, they respond to

threats in ineffective ways, which make it more likely that they will be overwhelmed again and retraumatized.

Imagine someone who fell into the water and nearly drowned and is left with a tremendous fear of the water. Psychotherapy, with its verbal work around the feeling of fear, would certainly be a crucial first step in the healing process. However, talking about the feeling won't teach the person to swim, and complete empowerment must (in this example) include the ability to swim. If the person does not learn to swim, then the person is still powerless and will still feel anxious around water. Without learning to swim, the trauma cannot be healed completely. And learning to swim with gritted teeth and suppressed fear will not be enough. Learning to swim with joy is crucial. Learning to experience joy and mastery in the situation of the previously overwhelming challenge—that is what will lead to recovery.

The work I do with abuse survivors is based on the fact that powerlessness is a somatic state and can be replaced by the somatic state of empowerment. The primary content of the work is practical, step-by-step exercises which work with breathing, muscle tone, posture, movement and intention to develop an integrated state of awareness, power, and love and, on that foundation, appropriate personal boundaries and effective selfprotection.

Once students can create the state of relaxed alertness and stability, I help them learn to apply this in their daily lives. I start with relatively simple exercises. I may stand back about two meters and throw tissues at them. Though they understand that this symbolic attack is trivial, it nonetheless reminds them of their abuse and can trigger deep fear. By maintaining their breathing and posture in a free and stable state, and then catching the tissues (instead of freezing in shock and dissociating), abuse survivors are taking their first steps in responding actively and effectively to their traumas. I help students work through a progression of gradually stronger challenges until they are ready for actual selfdefense instruction. Then we replay the actual assaults they experienced, and I coach them in the actions necessary to win this time. There is a special grin that lights up people's faces when they experience the joy of succeeding in keeping themselves safe and free.

By learning how to keep their bodies open and free, and learning how to protect themselves, abuse survivors rewrite the effects of their past. In working with survivors, I make use not only of the body awareness work that I have developed but also of actual Aikido self-defense techniques.

For more information about body awareness training with sexual abuse survivors, you could go to my website. I have articles available there on the topic (including one article on abuse survivors in Aikido classes) as well as a

downloadable e-book book, *Winning is Healing: Body Awareness and Empowerment for Abuse Survivors*.

### **3.8. Peacemaking**

Issues of conflict resolution and peacemaking can also be addressed as somatic processes. Conflict is usually approached through high level behavior or content. Content is the actual substance of the dispute, the conflicting desires or goals of the different parties; and high level behavior consists of the words or actions that are being used to create or negotiate the conflict. However, from my perspective, approaching conflict in the usual manner is like building a building from the second story upward.

The foundation for high level behavior is breathing, posture, and movement, and this is important to consider in conflict resolution. Imagine standing in front of someone who is angry at you. Perhaps he is leaning forward, getting too close, his fists clenched, his face red, his throat tight, his voice harsh and loud. What would you feel? In teaching about conflict, I often have students actually try this with a partner as a movement experiment, and most people find they have rather intense physical reactions.

Experiences in the experiment can vary somewhat, but people commonly report that when they are threatened, they restrict their breath, tighten muscles (often in their shoulders, throat, chest and belly), and contract their posture. Some people experience limpness and collapse, which is a more passive form of contraction.

This contraction results from two elements, communicative mimicry and defensive organization. Part of how we communicate non-verbally is to automatically and unconsciously mimic each other's body states. When we are around someone with a strong feeling, we perceive it, recognize it, and tend to do the physical actions of that feeling in our own bodies. This means that we may feel things that we do not choose to feel or find useful or enjoyable to feel. When we are faced with aggression, we naturally respond with the body state of aggression, and this contributes to the continuation and escalation of aggression.

The defensive organization is to constrict and get ready, either to fight or submit. However, shrinking in tense fear makes people respond weakly and ineffectively to attacks and actually encourages further aggression on the part of the aggressor. Needless to say, limp collapse also is ineffective as a foundation for defending oneself. Hardening with anger makes people respond to the attack in awkward, uncontrolled ways and also encourages escalation of the violence. Both fear and anger reduce the capacity to respond effectively to an attack. In other words, defensiveness is a completely unsatisfactory foundation for effective defending.

Soft strength, openness, and love are the basis for free and balanced movement and effective defense actions. In order to give people this experience and understanding in a brief, practical way, I use the basic exercises I have developed for teaching the body state of power and love. Once they have learned this, I have people to go back to the yelling experiment and see how it feels to be attacked while they maintain the somatic state of openness and fullness. They generally find that staying rooted in open breathing and posture transforms the experience. Rather than tensing or getting limp when they are attacked, people come to the experience strong and open and stay strong and open through it. They do not get overwhelmed by the attack but stay rooted in self-awareness and personal strength. The power people feel is constructed physically but is just as much emotional and spiritual as physical.

People find that staying strong and open vastly lessens the physical and emotional discomfort they experience when they are attacked, and they realize that most of the discomfort they experienced they actually created themselves by their tension or limpness and resistance. They realize also that when they were tense or limp, they were shutting down their awareness of both themselves and their partners, alienating themselves from themselves and from the attacker. Receiving the attacker and the attack in a mind/body state of power, love, and expansiveness, people find that they do not react with fear or anger and that they can continue to experience a calm connection to the attacker rather than feeling an urge to hurt and destroy him or her.

The somatic state of openness and balance is the foundation for resolving conflict and making peace. That state allows us to interrupt the back and forth non-verbal and verbal communication of aggression. It allows us to see our opponent as a human being, a partner. It is on the basis of the somatic state of openness that high level behavior can be convincingly changed. Imagine someone saying the right words about getting along and win/win resolution, all the while emitting physical signals of fear and anger. It would be awfully hard to keep from feeling threatened and threatening. Interrupting that somatic state and replacing it with the somatic state of calmness and friendliness would allow words and actions to be congruent with the body state. Expressing a desire for peace with both low and high level behavior simultaneously is a much better foundation for conflict resolution and peacemaking. And once that foundation is in place, the actual content of the dispute can be addressed with much less aggression and much greater clarity.

### **3.9. Aikido**

All of the BIM work on postural stability and efficient movement certainly applies to teaching Aikido. In addition, the somatic self-regulation that I teach as part of conflict resolution training also applies. In this section, I will focus on

how one particular body awareness concept that is part of Being In Movement can improve Aikido training. In my Aikido practice and teaching I emphasize aligning the body vertically. This focus came to me early in my practice, though it wasn't something that was emphasized or even taught. For me, it was a consequence of the meditations I was doing on symmetry and expansiveness of awareness.

If your posture leans in one direction or another, your awareness leans as well. The only body placement that allows equal commitment to all directions in the environment is the vertical postural line. If in Aikido practice you are afraid of an attack, you will naturally lean away from it. If you become antagonistic and resist the attack, you will naturally lean toward it. If you become over-invested in a throw, you will lean into it. In all these cases, you will lose your uprightness. Paying attention to staying vertical is a way of reminding yourself to maintain mental balance and equanimity. In that sense, paying attention to holding your body vertical as you execute Aikido techniques transforms the combat practice into a meditation.

However, maintaining the vertical line is more than just a spiritual notion. It creates more effective combat technique in three ways: it improves power delivery, prevents openings for counterattacks, and improves readiness to deal with multiple attacks. Let us examine two Aikido techniques to see how this works.

Let's start with katatori nikkyo. The first photograph shows a common way of doing the technique. Many people put on the lock with a distinct forward bend. However, in that way of doing the technique, much of the power comes from use of the shoulders and upper torso. In this instance, the power I could exert with my shoulders wasn't even enough to convince my partner to go down.

Keeping the body aligned correctly, as shown in the second photo, allows you to derive the power of the nikkyo from the movement of the pelvis, which is of course accomplished through the use of the legs and hips. There is a forward movement to transfer weight to the front leg and thus the nikkyo. In addition, there is a forward rotation of the pelvis, which inclines the spinal column forward though without bending it. This puts power into the nikkyo. Doing the nikkyo from the hips is much stronger and allows greater control of uke with less effort. Notice that the posture in the second photo is very similar to the posture in the third photograph of the correct way of hoeing.

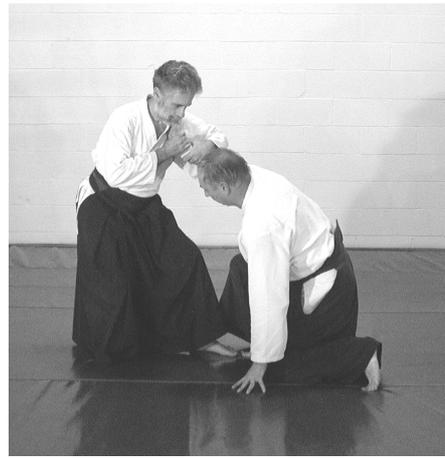
A second problem with leaning forward is that it leaves you open to a counterattack. When you lean, the force of the technique is delivered an arc through the shoulders, and if uke is alert, it is simple to counter the nikkyo. By sliding in under the arc, pulling forward and down on the nikkyo, and blocking nage's legs, uke can pitch nage over him for a throw (photos 3-4). When the

nikkyo is done with upright posture, the power of the nikkyo power goes all the way down to the ground, and there is no gap under which uke can slide to create a counterattack.

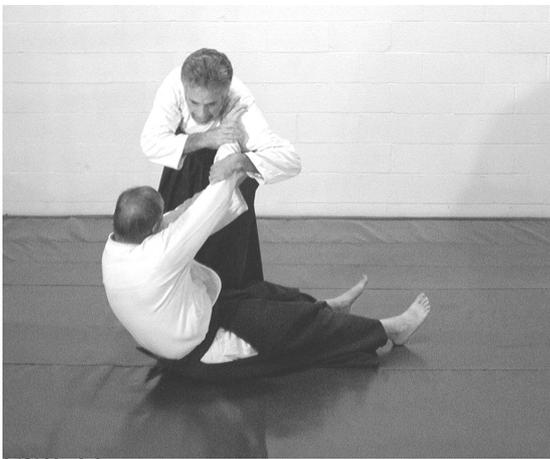
I have spoken of the incorrect nikkyo in purely physical terms, but of course there is more to it than that. What leads us to overuse the shoulders and bend forward? Overcommitment and aggression. The more upright posture is based on equanimity, love, and expansive awareness.



(No. 1)

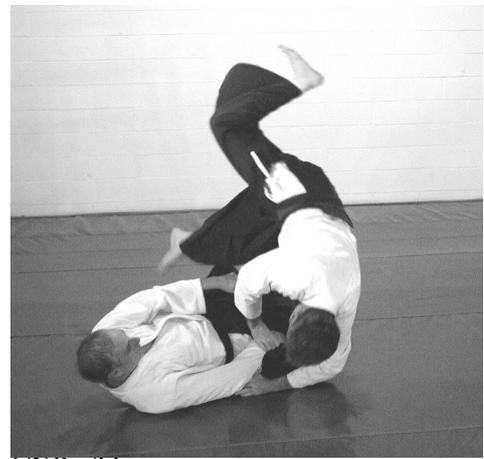


(No. 2)



(No. 3)

(No. 3)



(No. 4)

(No. 4)

As another example, let's consider aikatatetori kokyunage. In the version shown here, my right hand was grasped by uke with his right hand. I spun around and applied an arm bar for the throw. Many people execute this throw also with a pronounced forward bend (photo #5).



(No. 5)

And as in the nikkyo, the throw can be done with more power and better balance by moving from the legs and hips and keeping the body upright (Photos #6-7). Notice that the power that is applied to uke's arm comes from forward motion of my pelvis. Since uke is joined to me around the level of my hips, there is no reason to bend my shoulders forward.



(No. 6)



(No. 7)

In this technique, leaning forward with the shoulders does not leave nage open to a counterattack by the person being thrown, but it does require that nage perform a recovery moment to regain upright posture. Consider the use of this technique during a group attack, in which attacks come quickly and continuously. If nage is bent forward at the moment of the throw, in order to get ready for dealing with the next attack, it will be necessary to bring the torso back to an upright position.

During that upward movement, nage is not ready for the attack. When nage is bent over, she or he would not be able to see clearly what the attackers are doing or be able to move freely to blend with whatever attack comes. However, if the

throw is executed with the body upright, nage will be posturally ready to see the next attack and move with it.

The same considerations of spiritual balance and combative readiness apply in doing any other Aikido techniques. There are a lot more elements of BIM that I use in enhancing my Aikido practice and teaching, and paying specific attention to body awareness as a foundation for Aikido training is very productive.

For readers who would like more information, on my website in the Aikido section, I have a number of articles on body awareness and Aikido practice. In addition, I am working on a book specifically on this topic and hope to have it available in the near future.

## **4. Conclusions**

Aikido is my movement home, but Aikido itself is too strenuous and complex for many people. By developing Being in Movement mindbody training, I hoped to create a simpler, more accessible way of teaching people about the mindbody coordination that I gained in Aikido training. BIM offers a more rapid, more precise intervention into the many human performance problems that have their roots in ignorance of the structure and function of the body self.

The key is that we believe and experience that hardness equals strength, that numbness equals safety, and that barriers create freedom. We are so ready to create hard barriers in our bodies. Aikido teaches otherwise. BIM is a systematic method, derived from my Aikido practice, to convey to people the physical experience of openness and fullness and how to apply that experience in daily life.

The teaching I do is an extension of Aikido off the mat and into daily activities. My hope is that this presentation will inspire other Aikido instructors to find new ways of contributing their knowledge to the large numbers of people who need mindbody centering yet who will never study Aikido itself.

# **Form and Change: Acting as a Path – based on the Example of Aikido and Other Types of Body Work (Martin Gruber)**

## Introduction

1. On Didactics
  - 1.1. Aikido
  - 1.2. Hojo
  - 1.3. Suzuki training
  - 1.4. Structural-functional bodywork
2. The Conceptual Design
  - 2.1. Form as a path
  - 2.2. The way various body methods work
  - 2.3. (Theater) Art as living Form

# **Form and Change: Acting as a Path – based on the Example of Aikido and Other Types of Body Work (Martin Gruber)**

(English Translation by Wendy Hecker, Munich)

Form has never stemmed from a feeling of safety, but always in the presence of finality.

Ilse Aichinger

## **Introduction**

I still remember the elderly in Japan. The old masters I saw on my first visit to “Dojos” (Do = path, Tao in Chinese; Jo = place), showed me more Do than I was capable of admitting to myself at that time. And there were so surprisingly many of them. When practicing Aikido they threw men with ease and precision who were twice as big and less than half their age. They did it again and again with incredible endurance. The dancer, Kazuo Ohno, in his 80s at that time, danced with effortless depth at his Dojo, longer and more intensely than we, his students, thus demonstrating to us the long path that still lay ahead. We young people were the ones who looked old and clumsy in the presence of the old masters.

At that time my prejudice about a collective “I” and the well-adapted Japanese discipline, reflected only the limited view of an inexperienced Bavarian. These “old men” moved with the kind of spontaneity and individualism that I, in my youth, had never dared to try. It was as if daily practice of their art’s strict forms had ultimately led them to themselves. Their path was primarily to learn submission by means of a concrete task. True submission means learning to take leave, e.g. of the importance of one’s own Ego, of vanities, of baubles, and the temptation of short-lived effect, of showing off skills to others. Taking up a Do is a form of “Becoming.” It means spending a lifetime investigating the conflict between “I show” and “I am.” It means losing my conditioned Ego during the task to such an extent that I go to the limits of my possibilities and thus arrive back at my self. Only then can I freely give my self to others without losing myself.

My time with the international theater group “Suzuki Company of Toga” showed me that, in addition to martial arts, dance, music, and other disciplines in modern Japan, theater also still remains a *Do*. We, too, admire our grand, old actors, whose names we all know. They are, however, always exceptions, who have been strong enough to make their way alone. Our culture does not have the Asian tradition that sees learning about form as an aid to personal life-long development. With my own teachers, I continue to experience how helpful and thorough this approach is. With perfect timing, they have always shown me my limits while simultaneously opening new doors. One of these doors has been my attempt to pass on and adapt to Western needs my own experience with this Asian tradition. Therefore, I have reduced both martial arts, “Aikido” and “Hojo” to their basic techniques and combined them, both in content and didactically with Suzuki training and structural-functional bodywork. In this way, they have been systematized according to the needs of our theater so that they can become the expression and form of a “*Do*”, an actor’s path.

I introduced these methods as courses to the Otto-Falckenberg school of acting in 1986. Since the founding of the Bavarian theater academy they have been, in a course I modified and expanded, an integral part of the study program. I shall now attempt to show how these courses build upon one another, and which of the skills and unused potential needed in the acting profession they especially support and make available didactically. At the conclusion of this article, I shall present a diagram that shows some of the most important characteristics needed for absolute stage presence and how they work together (s. diag. 1). Those, who find didactics boring, can skip the coming pages and go straight to “concept”.

## 1. On Didactics

### 1.1. Aikido

Aikido is a modern form of martial art developed by Morihei Ueshiba in the last century. It, like all of the martial arts, uses physical attack by one or more opponents as the basic learning situation. “*Ai*” means the harmonization of opposing forces, “*Ki*” is life force, and “*Do*” is the path. The opponent’s aggressive intention is neutralized by way of *perception*, *acceptance* and *redirection*. The aim is to solve conflict on a higher level rather than simply to endure or exchange pain and blows. Aikido is a means of opening oneself in order to use the opponent’s strength for one’s own purpose. And this is done by throwing him down or locking his joints. Similar to a lively theater dialog, attack and defense are resolved in organic impulse-reaction-series. This occurs by means of flowing, natural and functional movements requiring the agility of a well-grounded body core and must be free from any kind of physical or mental rigidity. I usually react, for example, to an attack with a rigid, conditioned

protective stance by ducking with my hands in front of my head. This is exactly the physical stance that provokes a beating. In this posture I show, not merely outwardly, that I see myself as a victim, but I also mentally adhere to this posture in my mind. Remaining upright and open when attacked is quite a challenge to old reaction patterns. I have emphasized the Aikido techniques that require this very open stance, since they impart, among other things, sensitivity for the optimal basic position and its many variations on stage.

Combat scenes teach actors to take a position in a concrete challenge, using their own personal tools and resources, and also how to organize mind and body optimally. I consider the combat situation to be very important:

The person one wants to turn into an actor, must be gripped at the exact starting point of this eternal fight between life and death. (Barrault 1982, p. 371)

In order to conduct combat simulations that have such a high degree of physical dynamics, a detailed course of instruction in falling is implemented. This material is part of Aikido unlike other martial arts, which generally do not teach how to fall. During the training, each student learns how to fall without injury in any direction. The fear of the ground and falling leaves the student, which gives physical imagination more room for improvisation and also more space to work on a part. Numerous exercises for schooling concentration, breathing and imagination also provide support. An example of concentration and imagination is the well-known exercise called “unbendable arm”. If a student puts his stretched arm on his partner’s shoulder, relaxes, and concentrates on a dot on the other side of his fingertips, it will be impossible for his partner to bend the student’s arm. However, as soon as the student wants to be strong and flexes his muscles or merely relaxes without concentrating on the mental expansion, it immediately becomes possible to bend his arm. By doing this, the students discover that their imagination is strength and has immediate effect. Body postures are also practiced that make it nearly impossible for the partner to push the student down or to lift him off the ground – similar to children’s’ favorite “making oneself heavy”. This is done by relaxing *and* concentrating simultaneously.

Rhythmical phenomena, such as the Asian art form *Jo-Ha-Kyu*, become comprehensible in a concrete way during the movement course. *Jo-Ha-Kyu* can be translated “opening—development—peaking”, alluding to a dynamic arc of development, inherent to every motion sequence whose rhythmical course changes organically with the context (see Oida 1998, p. 59ff). Once this rhythmical sequence has been incorporated, it can not only be transmitted to the proxemics (?) of individual scenes in a theater performance, but also, for example, to the entire dramatic structure of a play -- to the walk of a gentleman or a servant through a room, to the budding of a blossom, or to a buzzard taking off from a meadow post. A technical by-product of the entire training course is

that the structure and specific course of action for a great variety of combat scenes required in the theater (from a restaurant row to a duel of words) can be recognized and acted by students.

The many possibilities Aikido offers for changing a situation require quite complex, intuitive behavior. Similar to work on roles, interactions with one or more partners are acted through with alternative plots being sought, and their effects are studied. The dynamics of the rule of proportion, “perception – acceptance – continuation” are recognized as a vital basis for cooperation, not competition. A particular quality of action based upon mutual respect and, in my opinion best expressed by the Japanese term *kokoro*, is practiced. *Kokoro* implies “heart”, “open heart” and also “mind and understanding”. The student attains deeper understanding of the relationship between cause and effect, impulse and reaction, question and answer and all their ever-changing interconnectedness. In terms of a dialogical principle, it is no longer possible for the student to react mechanically with previously prepared behavioral patterns. Again and again he has to deal with his partner’s unpredictable impulses, and this in turn requires heightened self-awareness and external awareness. Trust in one’s own instinct is renewed, and the distance between perception and action diminishes. The student learns to place greater trust in his spontaneous actions and to control them better and more specifically, which is ultimately one of the basic requirements for good improvisation and scene work. “Then I just stand here and am prepared” (Morihei Uyshiba).

During the entire training course, Aikido is a required subject that is taught twice a week. During these four years some of the students achieve the black belt, which is recognized in Japan.

## 1.2. Hojo

Hojo is a ceremonial swordplay, a ritual practiced in Cloisters that attempts to capture the essence of natural order in the changing seasons and make it concretely visible with gestures and voice. This ritual is a strictly formalized meditation in action. Each season is assigned a completely formalized sequence of movements, enacted by two partners standing opposite each other.

There is a notion, widespread in Asia, that the world is an ordered system in which macro and micro cosmos repeat phenomena be they big or small, physical or spiritual. To the four seasons are assigned, for example, four of the five elements (metal, wood, water, fire, earth), four of the five celestial directions (our four and the middle one), four of the five organs (heart, liver, spleen, lungs, kidneys) that also stand for the five states of mind. Therefore, summer is related to the celestial direction south, to the element of fire, the color red, and the organ heart, and thus to joy. Winter, on the other hand is assigned the celestial direction north, the element water, the color black, the organ kidneys, and thus

to fear. Spring and fall, summer and winter are quite similar in the sequences of their movements. However, based on their assignments, they differ fundamentally in tempo, gestures and dynamics. Experimenting with different notions about the elements, characteristics, etc. can be playfully put into motion and expression, thus creating the actual aliveness of the sequence. Again, it is possible to experience concretely how strongly imagination influences and changes even the smallest movement.

For one cycle of seasons the advanced student takes on the role of the “elder”, the “shadow.” who by virtue of his greater experience subtly controls the movements of the younger, less experienced, but hot-headed principle (“light”) and repeatedly reestablishes correct timing and distance for the less--controlled beginner. In the face of the opponent’s sword, every mistake or failure to concentrate is mercilessly registered. Supported by the form, both partners go to the limits of their attention. Eye contact between the partners never ceases during the entire length of a ceremony, approximately 20 minutes. By means of a special breath technique, the “fire breath”, air is taken in and heated up beginning in the belly area so that the body builds up a lot of energy which, during the entire course of the ceremony, leads to an ever-increasing *Ki-ai* (*ki*: life force, *ai*: union of opposites). *Ki-ai* discharges through the voice and is considered to be a sign of the absolute *union of thought, gesture, voice and sight*. Body and imaginative space are acoustically and visually extended, and the equilibrium of the fight is held from a certain point on by the mere quality of this powerful voice and the intensity of the stare.

Hojo is offered, along with Iaido (the art of drawing a sword) once a week before morning group teaching begins. Since they are so special, these classes are optional and are open to all students. Perhaps because Hojo requires an unusually high degree of self-discipline from each student, due to its strongly ritualized character and its standing out from regular daily life, these classes are usually well attended.

### **1.3. Suzuki training**

Suzuki training, also known as “grammar of the feet” was developed in the early eighties by the Japanese director Tadashi Suzuki especially for training his actors. It is a highly energized, very formalized physical training that improves grounding and supports an efficient physical and mental posture. Suzuki derived many of his exercises from Noh-theater and ancient shamanistic practices and simplified the movement sequences: in this way he took from the Noh tradition, for example, powerful foot-stamping designed to call up the spirits of the stage. He then combined it with elements of shamanistic dance, such as a monotonous rhythm used to induce ecstasy. A characteristic of the forms developed by Suzuki is that they cannot be incorporated into the usual vocabulary of theater

gestures and therefore cannot just be used with familiar movement patterns. This is exactly Susuki's concept:

The main purpose of my method is to uncover and bring to the surface the physically perceptive a sensibility which actors originally had, before the theatre acquired its various codified styles (Susuki o.J., o.S.) this sentence has something left out or modified, and as it stands, it makes no sense in English. If I leave out "physically perceptive" then it does make good sense.

The high degree of coordination needed requires a clear decision about form and a complete lack of adornment. Any relapse into private movement patterns takes one away from the group rhythm. The training makes it possible to experience immediately and concretely any inconsistency in personal design and actual action. A high level of dynamic group energy develops even after very few sessions. The individual learns to trust the group, letting himself resonate to it without reservation and draw strength and motivation from it.

I shall attempt to describe several exercises and their effects. The following applies to every exercise: no matter whether the body movements are big or fast, the pelvis should swing as freely as possible with the abdomen being relaxed, and all the limbs not needed to complete the movement should remain inactive. At the beginning, the group practices unusual ways to walk to rhythmical music, e.g. only on the instep or only on the outside of the feet, etc. These steps should be repeated with precision on an imaginary line in the room without interrupting the rhythm. The following exercise entails inventing so-called body statues. From the basic position, which is a quietly crouching position, the individual responds to a loud clap by taking a stance that he himself has chosen and maintaining it motionlessly like a statue, until the next clap is heard, permitting him to return to the basic position. The clapping is done at irregular intervals. The gesture of the statue requires that the heels do not touch the ground, which makes it more difficult to maintain balance. No statue position may be repeated. Beginners tend to design especially creative, unusual statues, thus either losing their balance or cramping up in order to maintain their form. It is necessary for them revert back to their basic stance in order to relax, although body tension and concentration during this and the highly tonic phase is supposed to remain the same all the time. Since, however, concentration and thinking are already constantly directed at the creative upcoming statue, the clap for the next change is often missed. In time students learn how to direct their focus away from grand gestures to minimal, clear, unpretentious movements – and also toward effortlessly maintaining equilibrium, transparent and alive over a long period of time. Thus, they learn that showing off is not really the most important aspect of this exercise.

Highly dynamic units of exercise alternate with more restful ones that are always done in pairs. Structured movement sequences are carried out, as the partners continue to mirror each other while gazing into each other's eyes. It is

helpful to the partners to envision being connected by a stick extending from one chest to the other. It will hurt when too much pressure is applied, (the partners are too close together) or will fall down when there is not enough pressure (they are too far apart). The individual partners are no longer important. They direct all their attention toward the space between them. This “between” them seems to thicken until it suddenly becomes perceivable to the participants. Simultaneously with the mirrored movements, both partners must speak certain sentences as if they were coming from only one mouth. If voice and body are grounded and centered and meet each other, then a sensation of vibrating density expands around the entire body. Similarly, in an additional choir-like exercise, the participants have to assume an uncomfortable physical position and declaim certain sentences in a relaxed, clear manner. The result of this is that speech will be experienced as being non-separate from the body, but rather an expansion of the gesture. In this way, the quality of the voice becomes a clear indicator of whether each position is taken seriously all the way down to the fingertips.

Another training element is a strictly choreographed circular dance in which the impulse for rhythmic stamping always has to be initiated simultaneously by the entire group, while the upper body and arms alternate with opposing horizontal and vertical movements. This tuning into a mutual rhythm during highly complex movement sequences moves the focus away from concentration on completing an individual movement to active attention on the movement of the group as a whole. Even the smallest deviation from a mutual beginning and ending impulse in any movement becomes both visually and acoustically apparent immediately.

Learning through pain and the danger of physical wear and tear or damage, prevalent in Asia, can also be seen in the way Suzuki training programs are put together. I believe, however, that only a body without pain and tension can actually react sensitively and exhibit maximum presence. For that reason I have modified several exercises to provide better care for the body and the voice. Extensive use of the body during this training has to be preceded by intensive work on sensible, healthy posture -- particularly, for example, during stamping - - and this work should accompany students throughout. I always begin with a warm-up and end with a period of relaxation. For beginners especially, posture exercises are very important; hence the intense warm-up period. For this I use exercises that I developed from Feldenkrais and Aikido, among other things, and I try to show students how they can minimize wear and tear and maximize endurance in the face of highly dynamic demands. This approach is intended to generate and maintain students' enjoyment in intense physical presence. Some of the traditional Japanese choir exercises that are overly loud (used by Suzuki to expand physical gestures) have been toned down to what we in the West consider to be a healthy degree, in order to protect the voice. Working with elocution teacher, Uwe Hollmach, I also integrated some exercises for voice

training, and we introduced the voice as a good gauge for permeability in each phase of training.

For these reasons I began implementing the old Shinto ritual “Torifune” (loosely meaning “to row a boat”) from Yoshi Oida to be used to end the warm-up period, since it optimally prepares concentration, body and voice for the Suzuki training that follows directly thereafter. In “Torifune” powerful, decisive movements resembling rowing are made, parallel to which prearranged chains of vowels are loudly intoned. Intention is directed toward body and voice simultaneously. It is necessary for movement impulse and voice to be coordinated exactly; the span of movement and breath are transmitted as one, complete unit. The principle of the body-voice unity of the *Ki-ai*, already described in Hojo, provides the basis for this dynamic breathing exercise, however in Torifune one gazes inward. The energy of the breathing that is clearly inhaled at the beginning of the movement and exhaled at the end allows warmth to flow through the body. The strong sound vibration makes it possible to feel into the resonating cavities, opens them and expands body awareness to space outside the body. Movement gives the individual vowels a definite direction, and they expand into a clearly defined space within and outside of the body.

At the academy, the training program begins with a two-week intensive course on the modified Suzuki method, including seven hours of daily training in the group. The fact that the form can be learned so quickly, along with the powerful effect of group formation, take away beginners’ anxiety, strengthen their self-confidence and motivate them to meet the demands of the coming course of instruction. Moreover, the “grammar of the feet” is appropriate as the didactic starting point because this method is closely tied in with other courses in the instruction program. Therefore, as was already mentioned in this article, elocution, on the one hand, has been incorporated into this program. On the other hand, I include exercises on polyrhythm from the Taketina method developed by R. Flatischler, in order to demonstrate to the students their structural similarities to rhythmical-musical courses. I also use the exercises to emphasize the importance of the optimal basic attitude, common to all the methods that have been introduced here to date, an attitude I refer to as a relaxed way to arrive at the gravitational line. This basic attitude is also the best prerequisite for being able to embody complex and opposing rhythms of movement. To test and integrate what has been learned, I always require the students to present short rhythm choreographies that can be judged on quality of movement and potential effectiveness and can be worked on by the entire group. After completion of the basic course a joint monthly training is offered to all students in the entire program. Prior to bigger projects and in preparation for directors’ auditions, the students usually choose a shortened form of this training for their daily exercises.

I have adapted from the Japanese tradition the ritualized cycle for all my group classes. Strict adherence to both a beginning and an end to the exercises and to etiquette in the exercise room helps students participate in the instruction course with full attention, leaving daily life and personal concerns behind.

#### **1.4. Structural-functional bodywork**

When I was 12, I began Judo training at an athletic club. At that time, when I stretched as best I could, I was barely able to reach my knees with my finger tips,. After five years of regular, intense gymnastics at the athletic club and in school, mainly rocking and pulling my upper body, I was able to stretch my fingertips a hand-length further than before. Yet after these exercises my back always hurt and was stiff, and I was incapable of bending or standing straight. Then I accidentally stumbled upon the Feldenkrais method. After only a few individual treatments, I was able to bend over and touch the ground with my fingertips, and I was no longer in pain when I stood up. This experience led me to training courses in Feldenkrais, body therapy, and Japanese Isogai, a system of medical exercises to correct bad posture. I combined these methods and adapted them to the needs of acting training, and I call the method “structural-functional bodywork”. During the last years, Feldenkrais, Isogai, body therapy, further advanced Rolfing all continued development, including knowledge gained from Neurophysiology and Osteopathy. All of these methods work with a natural range of movement to reduce constricting tensions and improve posture, in order “to bring both sides of the body into alignment and to organize the primary body segments (head, shoulders, thorax, pelvis and legs) according to the gravitation field of the earth” (Leigh 1993, p. 25). The body is aligned in an ideal fashion when the pull of gravity affects it symmetrically: then the energy needed for movement comes from the pelvis, and the head and upper body are unfettered. For the most part, this can be compared to the ideal previously described by Kleist of “a more natural organization of the balance points” or limbs that follow the “pure law of weight” (Kleist 1986, p. 476).

It is my desire to help an actor feel his ideal gravitational line, thus experiencing *potential movement energy* inherent in a good stance. If he has developed clear consciousness of his own point of gravity, then the power in gravity can be used to generate simple and beautiful free movement. Movement is most free, when its organization is simple. Muscles should not work more than actually necessary for each movement. In addition this protects people from tension and wear. As a prerequisite, however, I need to develop a feeling for the muscles I am currently using and flexing, noting which ones I need and which I can let go. The natural interplay of muscles is set up so that the taught, bent muscle always has to give way to the muscle opposite, if that muscle is extended. We can follow this interplay each time we lift up our forearm. This should have

happened when I bent my upper body in the manner I described earlier on in this article. Due to a bad habit, however, the antagonistic muscles in my lower back pointlessly tensed rather than easing up, thus almost completely preventing bending, while pinching my discs. As a result, due to my lack of body awareness, the gym class had really damaged my intervertebral discs.

During individual sessions the student demonstrates, for example, a seemingly simple movement from his behavior repertoire. Then the next step is to become conscious, action-by-action, muscle-by-muscle. After that, alternatives for the original movement can be developed, bad habits revealed, and possible mistakes corrected. This way the student learns how to check the course of his movements, and in so doing becoming aware of habitual muscle patterns. For example, the frequent and relatively harmless hollow back is responsible for permanent tension in the stomach and breast areas. This leads, among other things, to a tense abdominal wall and a rigid chest. Then, when inhaling, the diaphragm is only partially able to extend to the abdomen and the cramped chest impedes the filling of the lungs. By consciously reproducing the muscle groups involved in these incorrect positions, as well as the consequences of such patterns for the entire body, a better sense of individual physical blockages can be developed. Finally, work is done directly on the connective tissue and the muscles. With the aid of the instructor, tensions and muscle blockage are released, restructured, and then their effects on the entire body are traced. Automatic, blocking posture and movement patterns that are automatic and block free movement are frequently related to kinesthetic memory images that, during the course of the treatment, again become accessible to the actor. Situations embedded in his body memory can be accessed, and the process of learning by using one's own body becomes more concrete and easier to understand. The ability to organize movements more appropriately can, over time, become more and more generalized and be transferred to more complex situations.

On the whole, the treatments do not merely improve endurance and flexibility; they also have a positive effect on voice, awareness of space, concentration, and psychological resilience. The student receives support in improving his ability to protect his body from unnecessary pain and blockages. After the basic treatment of about fifteen individual sessions, the students have become able to draw upon this individual work for the rest of their training course. They are eager to participate in the class being described here, presumably because in most cases the treatments have an immediate, concrete effect that can be easily used in all other areas of the training course.

Interweaving the methods described earlier makes it possible for the students to put together their own warm-up programs independently, based upon what they have learned, that complement the requirements of their current work. The methods attempt to familiarize a student with the basic structures of movement,

rhythmical scenes and more complex actions so that he can quickly understand their essence and put it into action. All four courses try to convey basic skills in order to simplify learning the most varied kinds of movement, and the courses are fully coordinated with the other training courses in the area of “body and movement”, such as rhythmical-musical movement instruction, afro-dance and fencing on stage. Later on court dances, pantomime, acrobatics, etc. offer a great opportunity to expand an individual's wealth of gestures.

In order to intensify training, professional exchange, and the process of research beyond the limits of one's own subjects, the instructors at the academy are attempting to develop a common terminology that could be used in both scenic and technical work. Clearly stated terms that are used regularly ought to help the student to transfer experiences from one area of work to another, thus strengthening their trust in the training program.

## 2. The Conceptual Design

### 2.1. Form as a path

Contemporary theater is in the process of searching for new forms that connect to the present without losing its own traditions. What is successful today is already history tomorrow. Today's theater is influenced and often driven by a dazzling speed with which new media are developing. Also influential is a young audience that has grown up with rapid changes in technical and cultural developments. These factors have completely shifted the theater's focus to physicality at all costs. Above all, there is an immediate presence that can no longer wait to build up suspense over any length of time. Meanwhile, many innovative impulses are coming from the dance theater scene.

It is not merely a coincidence that dance is where the new body images can be seen most clearly. This demonstrates drastically what can be said about the whole post-dramatic theater: it does not formulate meaning but rather articulates *energy*, not giving an illustration but acting it out. Here everything is a gesture (Lehmann 1999, p. 371).

From my work with actors as a director and choreographer, it has become clear that a well-founded body training, providing a basis for engaging in and transforming ever new forms, images, movements, will have to move away from the classical notion of merely transmitting skills. A more complex approach is needed here, one that sees the learning of any form at all as a path, a medium for development. In this, Aikido is exemplary: it emphasizes learning movements, not for the purpose of demonstration but rather so that they can become an intrinsic part of the theatre work. I do not demonstrate movements; I become the movement, each time being the first time. “Becoming” is a distinctly creative act that the actor always has to generate anew. This “always being generated anew”

is what living theater needs, and for that it requires actors who are vital, present, determined, good at presentation, while simultaneously having individuality and awareness of the group.

However, when I say that the creative act of Becoming is the basis for acting, when I am serious about this always-being-generated-anew for the actor's work, what exactly does this mean for the actor himself? Specifically, what does this mean for his training program? What would a program that aims at something not static, but ever-changing look like? How would the great leap from demonstrating to becoming, from handicraft to art manifest itself? What would the ultimate leap, which each person has to make on his own, be like?

To begin with, it meant to me merely remaining simple. Art is something grand, and in the beginning there is always handicraft and discipline. Then the next thing is not to make it too easy for oneself. Understanding acting to be creative work means teaching a craft that needs to help a person jump. More precisely, this means a craft that assists one's "Becoming", that provides assistance all along the path. Becoming, however, is a process that encompasses both physical and spiritual development. To understand Becoming in work as Becoming per se, means to be ready for an entire lifetime of learning, or to be on a *Do*. This is necessary both for student and teacher.

## **2.2. The way various body methods work**

There is no one claim to absolute effectiveness and correctness of method. Connection to the "Zeitgeist" of the times, dependence on the teacher's personality and his "pedagogical Eros" are all too extensive for that. Similar to the theater, instruction on acting has to be a continuous attempt to make Utopia concrete. The methods presented here represent my Utopia and my practical answer. I have chosen them mainly because each one attempts in its own way to stimulate process oriented and holistic learning that serve personal development and independent expression. They do this, because they help the personality become itself and are not means of forming material. Because they teach me stringently and precisely, wildly and in a disciplined manner about form. Because they teach me form so stringently and precisely, so wildly and in a disciplined manner, I may leave without falling after a long period of development and safely be free, having arrived at myself. This happens because they teach me how to stand upright, to go from submission to standing upright to straightforwardness, the optimal basic posture.

And since they impart all this from various perspectives that require self-confidence, cooperation and a feeling for the group, a realistic, complex interaction comprised of separation and union of these opposites can emerge. Structural-functional bodywork emphasizes individual work on one person in a protected framework. The examination of one's own Ego is at the center of this

work, it being the fine tuning of inner and outer effectiveness, the search for one's own limits for possible expansion, needing no explanations or consideration for another. One's own body is read like a script, interpreted and re-written; the direction of this work is, thus, more like a monologue. In contrast, Aikido and Hojo exhibit strong elements of dialog, whereby the set-up of Aikido is dynamic and open and Hojo is closed and extremely formal. Both methods, however, concentrate on the other person. In Aikido the opponent is not reduced to an existing or alleged intention and thereby objectified. It always remains the subject, the other one, whom I perceive and respect, with whom I am repeatedly involved, prepared for surprises when challenged and answered. In the ritual-formal Hojo, the dialogic element shows up especially drastically through the expansion of physical and imagined space in the direction of the other person by means of the voice. This occurs because acoustical incorporation of the other into one's own space defines the success of transposition into the strict form of movement and counter movement. In Suzuki training, on the other hand, the collective is clearly the center of attention; it is strictly oriented to group dynamics, to which each individual must adapt himself. In training one also experiences the Janus face of every group: one is a part of the group and is also mirrored by it. This throws a person back onto his Ego, requiring it to interrelate again with the group immediately – otherwise one drops out of the group, and this is a merciless corrective.

Common to all these methods is that physical and mental demands are seen as a unit, that in each method the prescribed aesthetic form is not the goal but the means to attain personal knowledge and growth. They help to disengage the person from an instrumentalized, mechanical view of the body and to see himself as an indivisible body, as a living operative unit of body *and* mind. Only then is true progress possible. Only then can the physical regain its true meaning, transmit something real to me, and thus become a medium of change and moving beyond boundaries. Returning to the concreteness of the physical world by means of inquiry, at first it becomes easier to recreate oneself by separating oneself from old, familiar and frequently obstructive behavioral patterns. With the help of new, unusual forms, I might be able to cross pre-conditioned boundaries and try out alternative postures and expressions and test them out for myself. After that, however, a process begins whereby I understand that “the decision made by the body is worth as much as a mental decision” (Camus 1998, p. 15). I thus take responsibility in a new way. It is not a question of getting the students to shape up physically and show them an arbitrarily reproducible and exchangeable vocabulary of gestures. To the contrary, this often proves to be a trap, because the seductive, usually unconscious, recourse to what is already known quickly becomes a hiding place and makes it more difficult to really loosen up and try out new possibilities. Everything that is pre-fabricated always represents repetition; the posture is predictable, and thereby

boring as a theatrical act. However successful repetition might be, in the theater the artistic mechanical stance creates short-lived admiration without affecting anyone deeply. Ultimately admiring unresponsiveness remains the effect. For that reason I believe that the body's potential should be investigated, in order to gain a profoundly functional, structural and energetic understanding of the body-mind-unit that we ultimately all are. That way we shall be capable of responding to the variety and complexity of future demands with our own, unmistakable, open and varied wealth of forms.

### 2.3. (Theater) Art as living Form

It is only natural that when cognizance begins, when a movement cycle and its desired repetition occur, this will at first lead to the loss of natural, unconscious "gracefulness" that Zeamie, the famous Noh theater theorist, calls "flower" (*hana*). This loss of my natural form brings me to the long path of becoming conscious of growth, through which I gain depth and ultimately arrive back at my-self, at the "returned flower", the state that I always found so admirable in the Japanese masters. "It is the flower which is no more a flower; it is the technique which no more a technique; the spiritual attainment in art which stands above the mere form of posture or of the tone of voice" (Zeamie 1973, p. 69). Kleist's explanation is more complex:

In the same way that the average between two lines on the one side of a dot, after passing through eternity, suddenly appear at the other side...in this same way gracefulness reappears, when awareness has passed through an infinity... (Kleist 1986, p. 480)

The most important thing on this path of awareness is to become simple once again. Barrault also aims in this direction with his statement:

A mime should a priori be capable of moving with greater simplicity than anyone else, because he knows his own body. (Barrault 1982, p. 368)

But when is a movement simple? When I do nothing other than this movement. The difficulty lies in omission.

I am determined not to do anything useless. (Zeamie 1973, p. 68)

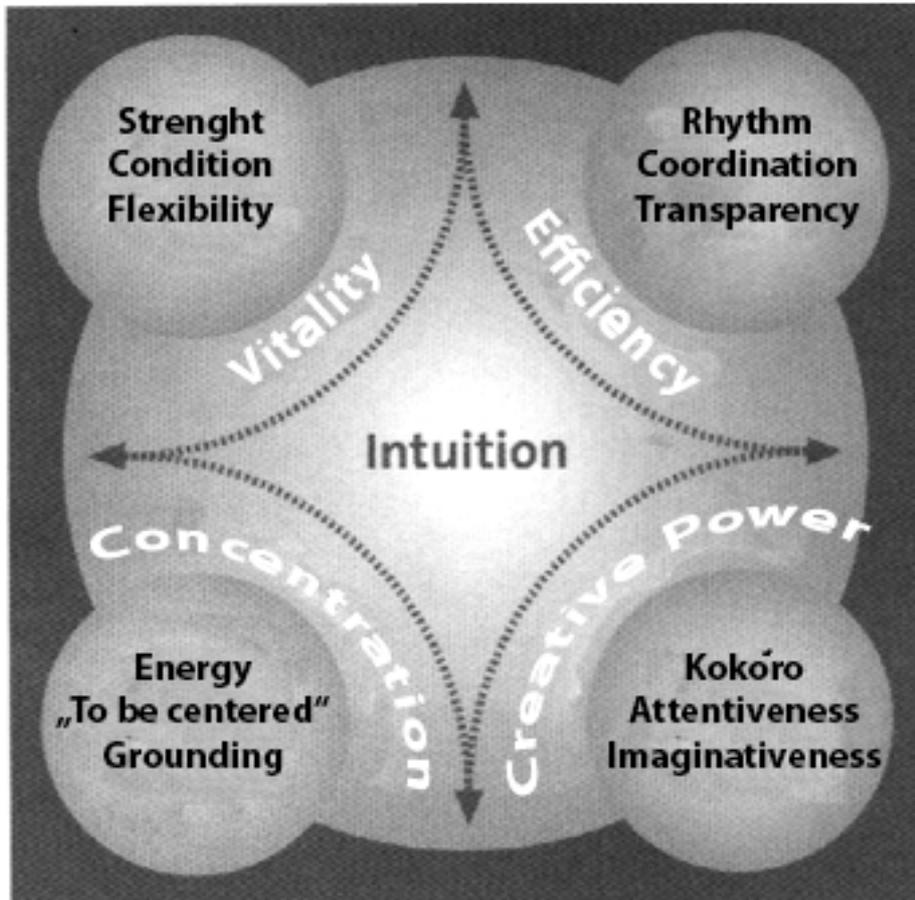
Here any excess diminishes effectiveness, because it is distracting. Not one too many muscles, no thoughts that are elsewhere, no frills, no vanity. That is when movement is free; it is free, when it could to stop at any point in its expansion and choose a new direction without losing meaning. That means, it is thrilling, because it seduces one to look, because the person looking (much like the opponent in Aikido) is incapable of thinking it through himself. It is therefore never mechanical. Nothing is duller than a movement, at the beginning of which I already know where it is going. What is merely boring on stage could, in a martial arts context, eventually be lethal for the person being attacked. In Aikido

the acting students learn, during simulated combat, how to take the quality of a certain movement seriously.

Is movement that is free also movement without desire or knowledge, although I want and know precisely? This is exactly the great paradox in the performing arts, namely its ability to be reproduced. For that very reason I need to become form so much that the form becomes a game to me that, although I have played it frequently, is new each time. I rediscover the form playfully again and again, and am surprised at the every new turn it takes. Playfully accepting this paradox and understanding it as a principle of aliveness is the actor's challenge, and most likely the challenge of everyone learning an art. The way the actor reacts to this challenge determines the quality of his performance that, in its highest form, sweeps him and his audience away to timelessness. What is this "highest form"? One could describe it as the end of the play. When this timelessness reveals itself, then I have endured being abandoned. Then I have jumped, have divested myself of safety and fallen into the void. In this exact moment of living fear "in the presence of finality" that the other, highest form, that no one can teach, emerges. Emptiness and fear are the actual potentials for creation. Here is where the present moment becomes eternity, and I attain absolute presence, timelessness, the action that is detached from time. The abstract perfection of form is not crucial to the depth of effect, but rather it is the process preceding form, the degree of loss and thus the intensity that the actor has experienced along the way. Actor and audience meet in the moment of the greatest loss; the depth of the abyss becomes visible and only the actor jumps, alone in the presence of the other's gaze. This is the way I see catharsis. The repeated redemption of this moment makes art out of acting.

I postulate that it is this understanding of art that ultimately connects Aikido to the theater and also to the other methods I presented in this article. Art differs from handicraft, in the same way martial arts differ from athletics at exactly this point: orientation toward results and measurement are forsaken, and in its highest expression, form and its safety are overcome. With the courage to experience emptiness, to surrender, which becomes a life-long task, the separation between art and life is abolished and "Do" gets realized.

# Presence



*Fig. 1*

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## **B) Sword Practice in Body-/Psychotherapy**

### **Aikido Sword Practice in Psychotherapy (Winfried Wagner)**

1. The Archetypical Sword Symbolism
2. Personal Aspects of Sword Practice
3. Interpersonal Aspects of Sword Practice
4. The Integration of Sword Practice into Psychotherapy
  - 4.1. Preliminary Reflections
  - 4.2. Practical Proceeding and the Question of Indication
5. Final Remarks

# Aikido Sword Practice in Psychotherapy (Winfried Wagner)

## 1. The Archetypal Sword Symbolism

The sword is a collective and archetypal symbol rooted in the depths of the human soul. Therefore it appears in the early mythologies of all cultures on every continent. For instance, in the mythologies of Greek antiquity, a sword is assigned to Hecate, the threefold deity of heaven, earth and underworld; Theseus killed the bull of Minos (the Minotaur) with a sword, and Perseus cut off Medusa's head with a sword. The story of the "Sword of Damocles", handed down from the ancient Near East, is generally known. In the Far East the Chinese guardian deity against demons, Chung Kuei, is always shown with a sword. Manjushri, the Buddhist bodhisattva of wisdom holds a book and a sword in his hands, and Vishnu, the god of the sun (light) and the preserver of the universe in Vedic Brahmanism, is always portrayed with a sword too. In the New Testament, the statement "I came to bring not peace but a sword" (Mt. 10, 34) is ascribed to Jesus. The wood engravings of Albrecht Dürer, a famous German artist, show different Christian motifs, for instance the archangel Michael, who defeats the diabolic dragon with a sword. These examples demonstrate that the sword is associated with something fascinating and awe-inspiring; both together, the "fascinosum" and "tremendum", are features of the "numinosum", i.e. the mysterious and divine (for more details about those and the following explanations see Neumann, 1984, and Schlegel, 1973). From these examples we can draw three conclusions which are relevant to our theme:

1) *One* deity stands for *two* opposite but complementary fields of life; that means, the sword, as spiritual symbol, stands for two opposite but complementary tasks of life! It acknowledges heaven and earth, light and dark, sun and moon, fertility and destruction, birth and death, hate and love, war and peace, wisdom and ignorance; and these *distinctions* are as necessary as is their *integration*, the consciousness of an all-embracing, divine unity. That means: In spite of its thrilling multiplicity, life is one whole, and in the face of all conflicts and doubts, each individual is an indivisible unity.

2) Concerning a fulfilled life, the principle of the sword is that it not only serves to fight enemies in the outer world, but, even more, serves to fight the "negative aspects of the shadow" within us. These are symbolized by the underworld (our

mortality) and the native bull (the domination by drives); by Medusa and dragons (the negative female aspects); by devil and demons or evil spirits (the negative male aspects). Therefore, the sword is a means to fight and overcome our own dark sides: our maliciousness and hostility, envy and jealousy, striving for possession and power, self-idealization, falsity and cowardice.

3) In addition, the principle of the sword serves the development and liberation of the “positive aspects of the shadow” within us. These are symbolized by heaven (the divine origin and spirit of humans) and earth (our terrestrial origin, incarnation and realization), by sun and moon (our latent countersexual aspects), by fertility (the creative potential) and death (the liberation or release from obsolete identifications). Furthermore, it serves the development of healthy aggression and autonomy, of will power and determination, of ego-strength and energy, of courage and willingness to take risks, of initiative and resolution, of the ability of discrimination and making decisions, of emotional calmness and mental clarity, of timeless wisdom and creative productivity, and so on. All these aspects can also be found in the interpretations of the sword cards of the “Small Arkana” of the Tarot (Waite, 1991).

But the sword symbolism is also found once in the “Great Arkana” of the Tarot: There “Justice” holds a scale in her left hand, and a sword in the right hand. The right hand and the sword are an expression for the principle of decision, whereas the left hand and the beam of the scales stand, more likely, for the principle of weighing. The ability of clear discrimination and of sensible weighing is the basis and precondition for making an objective judgment (decision). As a symbol of this objectivity, Justitia has her eyes covered. That is so because objectivity means not to let yourself be blinded by the obvious, and also not to deceive yourself by your own mostly self-related imaginations and prejudices (so called “projections”). At the same time, the covered eyes can also symbolize the ability of intuition. Intuition means realizing the essential directly, not through language, thoughts or images. Intuition and objectivity are the result of a long, drawn-out self-discipline and practice. They are an expression of a high level of maturity in the development of human beings.

The sword, then, is the archetypical symbol of the decisive and active male principle (in contrast to the bowl, which symbolizes the passive and receptive, female principle). It represents the power of uprightness of human beings against the downward power of gravity; and it stands for the power of cutting through and cutting off.

In summary: the principle of sword represents the creative and constructive power of the human consciousness which, based on its ability to discriminate and to decide, can find sound solutions for the problems of life, whether they concern biological survival, social affairs, or a meaningful and fulfilled life.

## 2. Personal Aspects of Sword Practice

However, the principle of sword itself is a “two-edged” matter as is everything in life.. The question of how to handle the sword principle in our daily life is after all a question of moral attitude. The sword can be used with primitive and destructive violence like a devastating blow with a club (as for instance the Greek mythological hero Heracles did). It can also be handled in a variety of differentiated and even constructive ways, which demand a significant degree of self-control, skillfulness and cleverness. Therefore, in my opinion, the following distinction between “hitting” (or striking, beating) and “cutting” is crucial for the connection of AIKI-DO sword practice and psychotherapy.

The Japanese tradition differentiates between “the sword that takes life” (SATSUJIN-KEN), and “the sword that saves life” and even “gives life” (KATSUJIN-KEN). The sword that takes life beats to death. The sword that gives life cuts: The path of the sword art supports the evolution of the true essence of human beings by detaching everything which is contrary to our “pure core”. These are the negative sides of our shadow mentioned above which have to be overcome so that the positive aspects will have a better chance to evolve. Therefore, the battle field is not in the outside world, but is within us.

It is crucial to AIKI-DO sword practice as I understand and teach it that we cut. We do not hit even though we use a wooden and not an steel sword for practice (for the sake of the practitioners’ safety). Exactly this is the essential difference from the pure emotional hitting as it is commonly used in cathartically oriented intervention strategies. But what is the difference between cutting and hitting? For didactic reasons I developed a basic sword exercise in six steps. In their course I elaborate experimentally on basics such as grounding and uprightness, centering in and extending from the Hara, transparency and connection of the body, as well as the distinction between “hitting” and “cutting” (see Wagner, 1994 and 1999).

Step 1: By the arched raising and lowering of the sword we explore and practise how the left hand and the belly (Hara) as well as the right hand and the top of the head (crown chakra) are related to each other. With this movement of the hands and the sword, we span the space between up and down, and between heaven and earth. We combine the power that ascends from earth to heaven (out of the Hara) with the power that descends from heaven to earth (back into the Hara). This step in the process has us practice centering in the Hara and connect that with arm movements.

In step 2, I emphasize the left hand as the hand of power and the right hand as the hand of direction. The practitioner discovers how the left hand embodies the power of the Hara, while the right embodies the “directive spirit”. This step

practices left-right-coordination of the hands, respectively the coordination of body and spirit (as required in all martial arts).

Step 3 continues with coordination, this time of the breath with the arm and sword movement. In this step, the practitioner experiences how the breathing pattern influences movement (it may make it more continuous and rhythmical), and vice versa, how motion influences breathing (it may deepen and calm it). This step of practice reveals how the “power of breath” (kokyu-ryoku) and the “power of movement” require and support each other.

Step 4 emphasizes the verticality of the body as the central axis between heaven and earth. The practitioner sits in front of a blank wall facing it, and imagines a vertical line on it (as a projection of the vertical axis). The task is to move the sword up and down as slowly as possible along that imaginary vertical line with as little deviation as possible. This step incorporates practice of a high degree of concentration, vigilance and mental clarity.

In step 5, I allow beating a pillow. By doing that, the practitioner discovers the archaic power and the vitality of hitting, be it emotionally charged or not. If there is some emotional relief caused by the hitting, we will discover the liberating and cathartic effect of beating.

Step 6 brings the practitioner back to the concentration and clarity which have already been practiced in the fourth step. This time, every downward movement should be a clear cut in a vertical line. Along with that we may imagine that every single cut divides a silk curtain into two parts. How do we have to handle the sword now, when cutting, compared to the hitting before?

The following representation summarizes what many participants have said about their experiences of the six steps of the basic exercise over the past few years. The main result is that cutting has a “clarifying effect” on the mental level in contrast to hitting, which has a “vitalizing effect” on the psycho-somatic level. Therefore, the question directed at sword practice as well as psychotherapy is this: Is it possible to combine the mental clarity and power of cutting with the vital power of hitting? Is it possible to bring together the “clarification of the spirit” with the “vitalization of the body”?

**Cutting (KIRI)**

1. Concentration on a line (cutting line), on which the energy is equally distributed: “make a cut”, “straightness”, “astuteness”
2. Con-centric (collected) unfolding of power
3. Emphasizes uprightness and self-control (self-discipline)
4. Clarifying effect: “Clearing and clarifying the mind”

**Hitting (UCHI)**

1. Concentration of all energy on a target: “to put it in a nutshell”, “one-pointedness”
2. Ex-centric (explosive) unfolding of power
3. Emphasizes flexibility and expression (emotional relief)
4. Vitalizing effect: “Invigorating and animating the body”

**3. Interpersonal Aspects of Sword Practice**

The six steps of the basic exercise did not imply any locomotion. The next step is to learn to coordinate your arm and leg movements in a way that “every step is done with a clear cut”. This is first practiced by stepping forward and then back. After that, you change directions to the right and left side. For this exercise all the principles of practiced so far still apply. At this point, the practitioner discovers he can best achieve coordination of arm (cutting) and leg movement by being grounded and upright, by being centered in the Hara and moving rhythmically.

Whatever one’s practice is, never should he lose the rhythm. Even the non-touchable has a rhythm. (Musashi, 1983)

Two rhythms overlapping each other result in a weave or “web” of inter-actions (Japanese “kumi”). Once all the basics described above are worked out, the practitioner can begin to practice with a partner. In formalized and ritualized sequences of interaction, an attacker and a defender may explore additional basic principles of immediate relevance for interpersonal and conflict interactions in daily life.

Step 1: When first practicing “sword against sword” with a partner, the main challenge is not to be spellbound by the opponent’s sword. This would lead to losing your own cutting-line or even hitting the other’s sword. You have to learn not to stare at the partner’s sword but to see the whole person behind it or to keep an eye on him. Basically, the problem is not the sword but the person behind handling the sword!

In step 2, we are working on the fact that all interpersonal interactions consist of an alternating approach and withdrawal. “Stepping forward” we enter into the dynamic sphere of another person (Irimi), “stepping back” we step out of that sphere again. On the one hand we have to bridge the distance to another person to reach him. On the other hand, we may have to expand that distance, for instance for self-protection, or to avoid getting involved unnecessarily. By doing so, the practitioner discovers that every attack is merely a special kind of approaching, and that a fight is a special case of contacting. Primarily, it is necessary to be aware of and to regulate the distance needed in this situation (Ma-Ai) to create safety.

In step 3, I introduce the principle of the triangular orientation (sankaku-waza). The triangle position is the most elegant way to take in consideration “three-at-once”: the “I” and the “you” (the different points of views), and the matter or means (the swords). Again, when entering and when withdrawing, the principle of triangular orientation requires for us to remain orientated to the opponents vertical axis (the cutting line) and not to be fascinated or intimidated by or involved with his sword.

For you to become the leader in this interaction, you must be able to maintain your own rhythm, or even impose your rhythm on the other person, It is also necessary to regulate the distance according to your personal preference in this alternating game of entering and withdrawing. I created different ritualized sequences of sword interactions, which reflect both universal (archetypical) “patterns of encounter” and patterns of everyday interactions and conflicts! Each one of them discloses a special aspect of or another variation on the same basic theme.

Of course, these practices demand a high degree of attention or rather “present-mindedness”. Sword practice is all about strengthening our “present-mindedness” in contrast to the absent-mindedness of our everyday mode of awareness. Our attention has to be “omnipresent” and fluid during the whole interaction. It requires that we are free of unnecessary thoughts and emotions, expectations and fears, intentions and distractions. The Zen and sword master Yamaoka Tesshu (1836-1888) once wrote:

A sharp, vigilant mind originates from a round mind (i.e. a calm, present-centered mind), because both roundness and sharpness are contained in a mind which is not attached to anything. (Stevens, 1989)

With this statement we are back again at the “clarifying effect” of sword practice on the mind, and the “vitalizing effect” on the body. This time it is in regard to everyday interactions and conflicts, which are the main topics of psychotherapy.

## 4. The Integration of Sword Practice into Psychotherapy

### 4.1. Preliminary Reflections

In psychotherapy “clarifying the mind” means identifying of primary and secondary basic assumptions, implicit beliefs and specific attitudes towards oneself (self concept) and towards life itself (view of life). It addresses inadequate automatic (depressive, phobic, compulsory) cognitive patterns and rational-emotional associations, dysfunctional attributions and rationalizations (Beck et al., 1979), introjects and projections (Polster, 1973), and so on - however different psychotherapeutic schools may name these features.

With the “animation of the body” we re-awaken suppressed and repressed feelings (catharsis, emotional release); we abolish retroflexions and deflexions [I would recommend either avoiding technical vocabulary or defining it ](Polster, 1973) We support spontaneous self-expression, the capabilities of bonding and setting boundaries. We establish more somatic presence and an expanded body consciousness as a psychosocial resource (a state of being centered and a source of life energy). We develop more frustration tolerance and a flexible social competence (variable patterns of conflict management), and so on - depending again on the terminology of different psychotherapeutic schools.

All these themes are typical for any kind of psychotherapy, no matter whether the approach is Behaviourist or Depth Psychological, Psycho-Dynamic or Somatic, Systemic or Transpersonal. Therefore, sword practice could be a valuable complement and extension of any kind of psychotherapy. That is what I thought when I started to introduce my AIKI-DO sword experiences into the psychotherapeutic process with various clients. Of course, I realized the difference between those two approaches: AIKI-DO sword practice is a more formal and functional medium of “work on one’s self” and is not oriented to resolution of personal problems. The context of the biography, current life situation and personality of the student are not addressed by the teacher (usually s/he is not qualified for that). Feedback is only given in regard to the functionality of the exercise (technique). Psychotherapists on the other hand are usually problem-oriented. Their reflections do concern the context of the client’s biography, current life circumstances and/or personality structure, often with a lack of formal and functional, ritualized and practice-oriented means to work on the self. The practical and archetypical art of the sword, and problem-oriented, context-related psychotherapy can complement each other in an appropriate way.

## 4.2. Practical Proceeding and the Question of Indication

In this theoretical paper I can show only a couple of basic strategies for integrating sword practice into psychotherapy.

4.2.1. On a *formal and functional level*, the basic exercises of the sword practice themselves have psycho-hygienic effects. Remarkable changes in the self-perception of clients/practitioners are discernible by outsiders as well. Clients report they are more grounded and upright, more centered and straight, settled in themselves and simultaneously in contact with another person. They are more “permeable to” and “connected with”, feeling themselves as “whole” and “round”, “complete” and “coherent”, mentally clear (determination, straightness, emphasis) and present in their bodies (more “expressive”, “radiant”, “vital”, “powerful”). Since I insert the sword practice at a specific point of the psychotherapeutic process, the relevant connections and transfer are obvious either by the context or by amplification and appropriate alternation of the exercise.

4.2.2. The *method of “keywords” or “key sentences”* connects certain parts of the basic cutting exercise (appropriate to the theme or context) with words or short sentences. That way the practice is associated with action and experience, which can then be embodied in a client’s “flesh and bones”. Here are a few examples:

- Sometimes I invite persons experiencing a lack of initiative and of resoluteness to focus their attention on the propitious prerequisites for cutting (for example, being centered in the vertical axis, being relaxed in the shoulders, observing the rhythm of breathing, etc.), when holding the sword above their head. Then I ask them to initiate or accompany the downward movement (the cutting) with a loud or sub-vocal “now” – because  
     ...whatever one does, one has to find the right moment. (Musashi, 1974)
- I sometimes invite people with boundary issues to imagine a situation from their everyday life where they need to set a boundary. I then ask them to shout “yes” or “no”, or “I want” or “I won’t” while cutting.
- I may request clients with insufficient self-control to imagine an appropriate situation from their daily life. I will then ask them to shout “stop!” when they actually stop the sword at the end of a downward movement in front of their hara. This can be compared to the method of stopping thoughts in Cognitive Behavior Therapy. The difference is that in the sword method, the mental or verbal formula will be associated with a real action in the context of a (imaginary) life situation. This can facilitate the embodiment or “incarnation” of the formula and a transfer into real life situations.

4.2.3. When working on the dissolution of outmoded experiential identifications, I prefer to work on a *psychodramatic level*. Often, these identifications are based on emotional entanglement with specific reference persons of our biography. It is necessary to emotionally separate from those persons in order to be able to “evolve”, and not to be “in-volved” anymore. In such cases I put an empty pillow in front of the client. He or she imagines the particular person sitting on the pillow facing him/her (this technique of the “empty chair” originates in Gestalt Therapy). Then I let the client cut, and each cut symbolizes the severance of one of these invisible connections, which we can think of as “psychic umbilical cords”. Keywords or key sentences appropriate to the context and subject can be used in order to support boundaries, dissolution and/or reconciliation. In the same way, introjects can be “cut off” the self (in place of “vomiting” that is enforced in some body therapies). This work is mostly a very emotional, cathartic process. Sometimes it is an act of strength as in a hero’s myth, where (in a symbolic analogy) Medusa is beheaded, the dragon gets killed or the Gordian Knot has to be severed. The difference from the cathartic techniques of other therapies is that I rarely let clients beat a pillow (only when a really archaic, primary rage comes up, see Lowen, 1977). I prefer to let them cut, because cutting stresses and dissolves the introjects, identifications and rational-emotive associations, which are typical for all of our expectations (see Clement & Perls, 1968).

4.2.4. On an *interactional level* we step further from imagination toward real interaction with an actual person opposite. This person can represent particular persons from the client’s past or present life. That method is indicated for clients who are caught in a manipulative or invasive, reactive or asymmetric interactional style (see Graumann, 1972). According to the subject or context, I choose specific ritualized (choreographed) exercises (kumi-tachis), vary them and create new ones. They may enable the client to overcome such complications by finding alternative possibilities for dealing with their interactional patterns. This work is generally not as emotional-cathartic as the psychodramatic method. It centers around recognizing ineffective or even pathological, interactional patterns and practicing effective strategies to deal with them. In that respect, this is more a behavioral therapeutic access, like a training in social competence. This work can also be done with keywords and key sentences. For instance, the phrase “every step a cut” can be applied when working on the liberation from emotional dependence in any kind of relationship.

In my experience the application of the sword principles of AIKI-DO in psychotherapy has proved to be effective when clients

- experience insufficient initiative and willingness to take risks, or have difficulties in handling excitement and fear (for life);

- possess insufficient social competence regarding constructive contact and conflict management;
- need to make a clear distinction and decision;
- need to make “a final cut”, for example to disengage from a phase of life, especially from persons representative of that life period (“every step a cut!”);
- need to overcome disappointments, give up illusionary expectations and outmoded identifications associated with boundary and self-assertion issues;
- require uprightness, grounding and centering as a psychosocial resource (if “head, heart and hara” do not co-operate).

## 5. Final Remarks

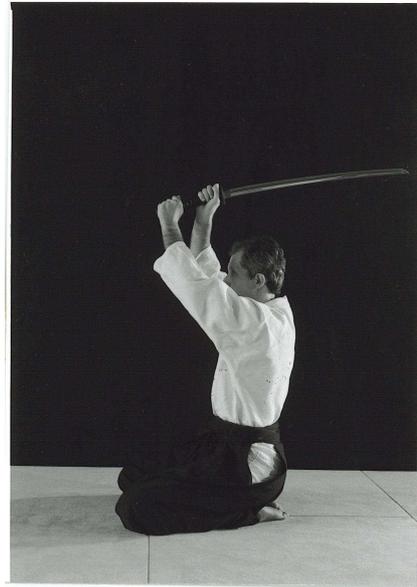
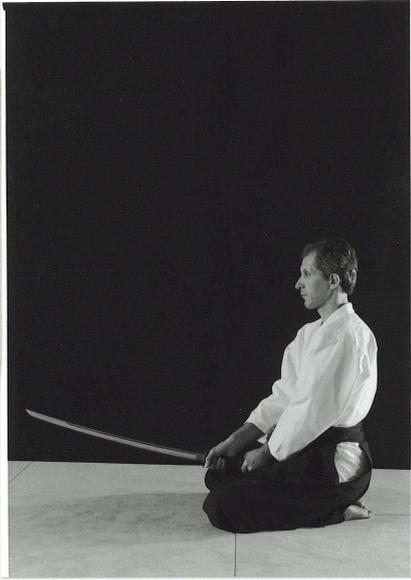
The development of both AIKI-DO and psychotherapy aim at a human being who connects and integrates uprightness and grounding, centering within himself and extending out into the world - in psychological terminology: who connects and integrates spirituality and reality, autonomy and relationship, self-responsibility and global responsibility. The sword symbolizes and embodies the spiritual principle of clear discrimination between “the noble” and the mean of a person, between the essential and the profane. It cuts through the veil of deceptions and distractions. It leads to sincerity of the heart and clarity of the spirit, which are the preconditions to making clear decisions for life. The Tao-Te King,

”The noble person only searches for decision, nothing more - for the decision that’s necessary, without boasting and violence”. (verse 30)

Cutting with the sword as a practice is both a medium and a mirror of the individuation process of the person practicing. Therefore, the spiritual traditions (in our case AIKI-DO) as well as the western psychotherapies can be understood as transmitters of evolutionary processes.

(English Translation by Mirjam Wagner, Schweinfurt.

Corrections by Stephen Schoen, San Rafael and Erika Rein, Petaluma)



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# **Resolving the Body Schema of Anxiety: Sword Training as Empowerment for Trauma Victims (Bertram Wohak)**

1. Introduction
2. Biology: The Defensive Reflex
3. Pathology: how a Defensive Reflex can become the “Body Schema of Anxiety”
4. Therapy: Empowerment Heals
  - 4.1. Creating the Basis: Standing and Walking Correctly
  - 4.2. Energizing: The Breathing
  - 4.3. Developing Resources: Individual Training with the Bokken

# **Resolving the Body Schema of Anxiety: Sword Training as Empowerment for Trauma Victims (Bertram Wohak)**

As a body therapist and aikido instructor I often work with clients and students, whose bodily structure had become fixed in a characteristic configuration termed by Moshé Feldenkrais as the “body schema of anxiety”: a chronic contraction of the flexor muscles on the front of the torso, a flattened thorax and restricted breathing. It is a chronic form of an ancient defensive reflex, instinctively to bend over, contract and hold one's breath in reaction to falling, shock, fear or other threats. The defensive reflex should cease once the threat is over, but in many people has instead become a permanent neuromuscular pattern that is no longer consciously controllable and can be considered a “sensorimotor amnesia” (according to Thomas Hanna). In this article I will describe how training with a bokken (a wooden training sword modeled on the Japanese katana) can be used to empower and rehabilitate trauma victims by resolving this “body schema of anxiety”.

## **1. Introduction**

Two observations led me to consider working with the bokken outside the martial arts, where I had learned and practiced with it over a long period:

One observation came from treating body therapy clients suffering from chronic contraction of the flexor muscles on the front of the torso, rounded shoulders, and limited breathing capacity. In many instances, such clients also had difficulties in asserting themselves and in expressing their energy appropriately in critical situations. Even with deep structural body therapy, it was rarely possible to resolve this body schema, and improvements were often not lasting.

My second observation resulted from one-week ki-retreats which I have carried out with small groups for several years: after just a few days of intensive practice with the bokken, participants with various forms of the pattern previously described improved surprisingly. Their whole bodies straightened up and stretched out. Their breathing and voices became freer and deeper. Their personal presentation was transformed. Clearly, experiencing comfortably and effectively defending themselves against attacks with the bokken had helped

them to express and experience their own energy and hence to overcome their “body schema of anxiety”.

These observations motivated me to study bokken training more closely from a body therapist's perspective. I was interested in how it can contribute to improving the structure, function and energy of our bodies, and enable us to reach a higher overall level of order, balance and freedom.

First, from a structural perspective, if a well-organized body is standing upright, the major segments, the head, shoulders, thorax, pelvis and legs, should be arranged vertically in the Earth's gravitational field. Good organization can be recognised when seen from the side because the ears, shoulder joints, hip joints, knee joints and ankles are arranged on one vertical line. Furthermore, the right and left sides of the body are symmetrical, the pelvis is horizontal, the spine is almost straight and the head sits free and mobile directly above the spine, rather than being displaced forwards, as is common. This structure requires the least muscular tension to remain upright against gravity, and as a result allows the greatest freedom of motion. Ida Rolf, the originator of Structural Integration, was of the opinion that gravity even helps to energize a body that is oriented in this way:

[a] symmetrical, balanced pattern in a man's segmented aggregate of material units allows his lesser field to be reinforced by the greater field of the earth. (“Rolfing” by Ida P. Rolf, page 30)

Normally, as adults, we are, however, far from upright and well oriented. Inevitable physical and emotional burdens and traumas over the course of our lives accumulate in our body tissues. Compensatory mechanisms and unconscious habits can easily cause such deviations to become embedded and perpetuate them long after their actual cause. The longer they last, the more deeply such damaging patterns can become engrained in our sensory and motor functions. They finally become visible when our body structure is no longer vertical, symmetrical and balanced. Chronic muscular hypertension, reduced mobility, weakening and pain almost always result.

The therapies offered by orthodox medicine, particularly orthopedics, for disturbances of the body structure such as tilting of the pelvis or shoulders, differences in leg lengths and scoliosis, as well as for related symptoms such as back and shoulder aches, lumbago, sciatica and limited joint mobility, are in most cases severely unsatisfactory. Extremely expensive, high technology diagnostic tools such as nuclear magnetic resonance are almost invariably prescribed for a wide range of motor ailments, but are in stark contrast to the severely inadequate range of possible treatments. As a result, a large proportion of orthopedic patients seem to be disappointed by the therapy available. However, overall structural body therapy rarely leads to lasting improvement either, as long as it concentrates only on orienting the skeleton, muscles and

connective tissue, without considering the functional and energetic aspects of the “body schema of anxiety “.

## **2. Biology: The Defensive Reflex**

Our characteristic movements and postures, including inappropriate and ineffective ones, are learned and “programmed” into our nervous system. These patterns are inseparable from certain thoughts and feelings. Shock, fear or threat lead involuntarily to the defensive reflex, a contraction of the flexor muscles on the front of the torso.

This pattern of contraction of the flexor muscles always arises when a person resorts to passive self defense, whether it be because the person does not have the resources for active defense, or because the person doubts his or her own strength and ability. The muscles that stretch us and hold us upright are then inevitably somewhat inhibited. Based on my observations, in people considered “introverted”, these straightening muscles are usually poorly developed. (“Die Entdeckung des Selbstverständlichen” by Moshé Feldenkrais, page 106).

Thomas Hanna, the founder of “Hanna Somatics”, characterized this pattern of contraction of the flexor muscles as somatic retraction:

This phenomenon of somatic retraction is a very special event. In characterizing it I have used the words cringing and shrinking. This is precisely what the neuromuscular functions are doing in response to an intolerable stress. In somatic retraction, the functions draw the body inward, from the periphery toward the center, making it smaller. Not only is the spine shortened by the muscular contraction around the lumbar and cervical vertebrae, but the arms and legs, shoulder joints and hip joints contract, flexing inward and narrowing the width of the body. It is the same cringing and shrinking response that occurs in any animals when they are frightened or stricken: they withdraw into themselves, becoming smaller, tighter, and less visible, as if, in order to protect themselves, they are attempting to disappear by pulling everything inward toward the center. (“The Body of Life” by Thomas Hanna, p. 35).

The withdrawal reaction or defensive reflex is initiated by the brain stem, an area of the brain which dates from much earlier in our evolution and is much faster than the sensory and motor parts of the cerebral cortex, which are responsible for our conscious movement. The brain stem is also known as the reptilian brain, as it is reptiles' most highly developed neural structure.

The defensive reflex is a primitive, but nevertheless very effective mechanism also found in lower organisms. This contraction and withdrawal can for example be seen when a snail is touched lightly, and is even present in worms despite their very simple nervous systems. The defensive reflex is very fast, even in mammals including humans, their most complex representative. Within only a few milliseconds of a stimulus such as a very loud noise, nerve impulses from

the brain stem cause the trapezius muscles to contract, the shoulders to rise and the stomach muscles to tense. The front of the thorax and pelvis are drawn closer together, the breath is held and the body ducks and contracts to take on an embryo-like defensive position.

The organism can fight, flee or become rigid in reaction to a threat. These behaviors are parts of a defensive system. If the organism cannot fight or flee, it instinctively contracts and resorts to its last alternative; it becomes rigid. During this contraction the energy which would have been used to fight or flee is compressed and retained in the nervous system. (“Trauma-Heilung” by Peter A. Levine, p. 106)

### **3. Pathology: how a Defensive Reflex can become the “Body Schema of Anxiety”**

The defensive reflex occurs fast and without conscious activity. It is our most primitive protection, initiated by parts of our nervous system that we share with many non-human organisms. But how can a reflex that is so important for our survival, so easily lead to a chronic body schema in humans, which does not occur in animals?

When animals escape a threatening situation, they usually expend the muscular tension they had built up in vigorous flight or fight reactions, which liberate the energy stored in their bodies. The same lower areas of the brain that initiated the defensive reflex can complete the instinctive reaction cycle. As a result, animals in the wild return relatively rapidly to their normal patterns of behavior once a threat is over. A chronic “body schema of anxiety” does not develop, because energy does not remain bound in their bodies.

It seems that the most highly developed and “human” part of our nervous system causes the development of the “body schema of anxiety”. The sensory and motor parts of our cerebral cortex are able to overrule the direct stimulus-response reactions of the brain stem that largely govern animal activity. We, in contrast to animals, as a result have almost unlimited capability to learn new sensorimotor behaviors. However, this freedom brings the risk of pathological development. Peter Levine, the trauma researcher, comments:

Why can't humans enter and exit these diverse reaction patterns as naturally as animals? One reason is our highly developed neocortex (the rational part of our brains), which, motivated by fear and a strong need for control, can hinder the instinctive impulses and reactions of the reptilian brain... In people, traumas result because an instinctive reaction cycle is initiated but not completed. (“Trauma-Heilung” by Peter A. Levine, p. 107)

There is no clear distinction between physical and emotional traumas. For example, if a child is often beaten, it will try to protect itself by contracting. It

will duck its head, pull its shoulders forward and hold its breath in expectation of the blows. As the child usually cannot flee or fight, it can only contract. A traumatic body schema will result if this occurs regularly. By comparison, if a young girl is unusually large or matures early and feels she has developed large breasts long before her peers, there is a high probability that she will try to reduce the resulting feeling of insecurity by making herself smaller, flattening her chest, pushing her shoulders forward and so developing a similar schema to the child that was repeatedly beaten.

A particularly serious form of trauma results from the abuse of children by adults. This problem is significantly more widespread than is generally assumed and is only gradually gaining public awareness. The results for the afflicted children are often devastating and endure for their whole lives.

When someone is abused, whether physically, sexually or emotionally/verbally, they learn that they are profoundly powerless, powerless to control their bodies and their environment and create safety. That sense of powerlessness becomes a core element in their self-identity, and many of the symptoms of trauma such as dissociation, drug abuse, body numbness, or acting out involve some feeling/belief on the part of the survivor that they cannot create safety. (“Winning is Healing” by Paul Linden, p. 2)

In one important respect, abuse victims develop a special form of “body schema of anxiety”: the child's experience of powerlessness to resist an abuser who is frequently a member of the family and from whom the victim is emotionally and existentially dependent, leads to a disturbed attitude in regard to their own strength and energy which can permeate all aspects of their lives. In my work, I have often noticed that adults, who were abused as children, have severe difficulty setting and protecting their own boundaries. This inability to defend themselves appropriately results from a disturbed relationship to their own strength, caused by the abuse they suffered. The child experienced strength or power as so profoundly abusive, that the adult later sees suppressing its own energy as almost the only alternative to becoming the aggressor and so risking becoming abusive. The individual cannot experience expressing energy as positive and accepting of life.

Adults with this pattern usually have difficulty in my courses in attacking their partner “properly” and allowing their energy to flow freely and enthusiastically. Their natural and positive ability to be “healthily aggressive” is disturbed and blocked by this deep-set assumption that power is intrinsically abusive. This leads to a very serious form of the “body schema of anxiety”.

The breathing of abuse victims is typically disturbed, particularly their breathing out, which is mostly abrupt, jerky, strained, laborious and incomplete. Exhaling corresponds to giving up energy, which is exactly what abuse victims do not allow themselves. Consequently the breathing disturbance tends to worsen when

the person is in an energetic state: The increase in energy in the body is perceived as threatening and causes anxiety, which exacerbates the breathing disturbance. At the same time the body has difficulty releasing the energy precisely because breathing out is obstructed.

The reactions which make up this “body schema of anxiety” do not occur arbitrarily, but through the autonomous nervous system, unconsciously and mainly on an energetic level. The therapy should therefore, as well as consciously reconditioning, above all concentrate on the energetic level itself: if the afflicted re-learn to express their energy without obstruction and to experience this as lively and positive, their traumatic injuries can be thoroughly healed.

## **4. Therapy: Empowerment Heals**

The most important concept behind the therapeutic application of my bokken training is empowerment. The feeling of powerlessness, which underlies the contraction and blockage, can disperse once the afflicted learn to be in contact with their energy sources and experience their capability to defend themselves. They can progressively develop the necessary resources in their body and self-image to enjoy letting out the energy previously compressed and restrained by the “body schema of anxiety”. The schema and its physical, psychological and social symptoms can then be resolved, healing the afflicted in both body and soul.

On this topic, my friend and colleague, Paul Linden, the body therapist and Aikido master from Columbus, Ohio, USA, comments that

for the deepest healing to take place, purposive and effective behavior must have a solid foundation of correct body alignment, proper breathing, and expansive intentionality. To focus on a clear purpose, and to execute that purpose effectively demands correct use of the body. Merely pushing someone away, for example, while gritting one’s teeth, stopping one’s breath, and scrunching one’s shoulders, won’t be as healing. Healing comes from reclaiming joy as a foundation for power. And joy is a by-product of correct body use. (“Winning is Healing” by Paul Linden, p. 16).

Training with a bokken has proven to be an ideal way to achieve this.

### **4.1. Creating the Basis: Standing and Walking Correctly**

When I teach the use of the bokken for body therapy, I usually start with the feet. Clients should first improve their feeling for their feet, to feel that their feet are as lively as possible. For us overly cerebral people of the first world, our feet are somewhat akin to a third world country, they are underdeveloped and

underrepresented in our consciousness; often we are hardly more aware of them than of the tires of our cars. People with the “body schema of anxiety” frequently have an uncertain stride and little awareness of how they walk. Practice in standing and walking therefore plays an important part in my courses and retreats. Attention particularly focuses on developing awareness of “one point”, by which my Aikido master, Nobuyuki Watanabe Shihan (8<sup>th</sup> Dan) from the Hombu Dojo in Tokyo, describes the best possible organization of the body along its vertical axis, which enables us to reach our fullest size and freedom to move in all directions. This bodily organization applies not only when standing still, but also when walking; during every step this “one point” is consciously traversed. Intensive walking practice develops the participant's trust in his or her own stable grounding (e.g. forwards and backwards, individually and synchronously with a partner, with the eyes closed guided and unguided). Grounding, when standing still and when moving, thus becomes a first important resource with which to overcome the “body schema of anxiety”. Once my clients develop this stable lower foundation by intensifying their awareness of their ground contact, it helps them to avoid “lifting off” when they raise the bokken; they consciously stretch downwards (which is unusual) as well as upwards.

## **4.2. Energizing: The Breathing**

Breathing is an exceptional bodily process, in that it can be governed both unconsciously by the body's autonomous nervous system and consciously by the mind. Breathing is simultaneously a bodily and cerebral, material and immaterial, unconscious and conscious process. Most people with the “body schema of anxiety” are unaware that their breathing is constrained. Learning to breathe more consciously and deeply helps them to raise their bodily awareness and their energy levels.

Although there are numerous breathing exercises and techniques, in my bokken training I particularly teach a way of breathing I learned from my Aikido master, which is practiced in the Budo martial arts and also in traditional Japanese Noh Theater. Its principle is to hold one's breath in one's lower belly, and while the breath is held to execute powerful movements with a feeling as though a sphere tightly filled with energy is right at the body's center.

One of the secrets of Noh Theater is to know when to hold your breath. For example, to stand up from a sitting position, you should breathe in while sitting, then hold your breath and stand up without breathing out. (“Der unsichtbare Schauspieler” by Yoshi Oida and Lorna Marshall, p. 137)

Eugen Herrigel also describes this breathing technique in his classic “Zen in the Art of Archery”:

Breathe in softly, then press your breath downwards gently until the abdominal wall tenses moderately and hold it there for a while. Then breathe out as slowly and evenly as possible and hesitate for a moment, before inhaling again rapidly. Continue breathing in and out in this manner, in a rhythm that will slowly begin to be self-determining... Inhaling... stabilizes and connects, everything important happens while the breath is held, and exhaling lets go and completes by removing all restraints.



In my courses it has proven helpful to practice this breathing technique without the bokken initially, standing still and walking. Firstly, the arms are raised, the body stretches and the exhaled breath is directed upwards (picture 1). At the position of maximum stretching the body is empty. Then a short breath is taken and directed deep into the lower belly. It is like eating air; it feels as though the air is flowing through the palms and falling vertically right down into the lower belly to fill the entire center of the body with a compact and stable feeling. While the breath is held and this feeling is maintained, the arms are allowed to fall, with the elbows leading the movement. The arms are allowed to fall with relaxed shoulders; there should be no particular emphasis on hitting or cutting. Energy should be projected forwards; the common downward woodcutting movement would tend to compress the body rather than opening it. Initially, practicing without the bokken makes it easier to coordinate breathing and movement and to project energy forwards and outwards rather than downwards. For emphasis, the index fingers can be stretched forwards as though they were laser pointers painting with light on the opposite wall (picture 2).

The exercise can then be repeated, beginning by raising the arms and exhaling, first standing then walking.

Although many participants are initially unaccustomed to this way of breathing, they nevertheless soon discover its energizing effect. Walking around the room like this and playing with projecting energy forwards helps to change participants' own image of aggression. Particularly trauma victims and those who have difficulty protecting their own boundaries begin to discover how to healthily express their energy and to be “aggressive” in a natural way.

### 4.3. Developing Resources: Individual Training with the Bokken

The bokken is a representation of the Japanese long sword (katana); the sword itself is in many cultures an archetypal symbol for the active, manly principle. It is associated with an upright and sincere outer and inner stance and implies clear, decided, cutting, distinguishing, dividing and defensive capabilities. It helps to draw boundaries effectively: “up to here and no further!” Training with the bokken enables participants to identify with this principle through experience, which particularly benefits those with the “body schema of anxiety”.

The basic movements of raising the sword, cutting and the related breathing are already familiar from practice without the bokken. One difficulty often occurs at this stage: without the bokken most participants have succeeded in dropping their arms without forcing the downward movement, but merely holding the bokken often triggers an instinctive downward “chopping”, which contracts the front of the trunk. This can be overcome with awareness and practice.

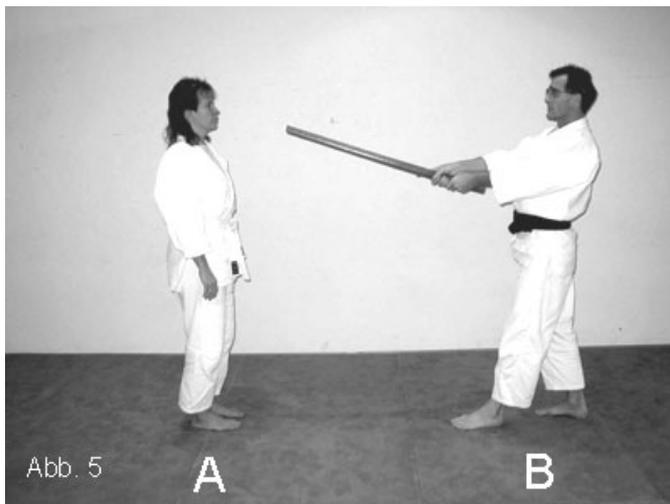


A significant step towards de-conditioning this “chopping”, a reflexive contraction of the flexors, is often achieved by placing the emphasis on the lifting phase when the body stretches (picture 3), rather than (as is common) considering it a supporting movement for the following cutting phase (picture 4). My Aikido master says:

Put your energy into raising the bokken; to do that you need to stretch your bodies and to lift your arms and the bokken upwards against gravity. To cut, you don't need to do anything; you just need to allow your arms to fall with the bokken, because gravity will help you.

Practicing this exercise individually is an excellent way to open the whole body, to enliven the thorax and inter-costal muscles, to deepen the chest and diaphragm breathing, to release accumulated tension from the shoulders and to improve awareness of the vertical axis of the body. If the bokken is often used in this way, the left and right hands should be alternately positioned at the front, to develop the shoulders and arms symmetrically.

#### 4.4. Using Resources: Working with the Bokken in Pairs



Participants can now experiment in pairs with situations that at least simulate a threat, taking both attacker and defender roles. It is interesting that the majority of course participants who exhibit the “body schema of anxiety” initially find it difficult to authentically attack their training partners with the bokken, that is, attacking without stopping their energy. It is important to introduce safety rules and to start

slowly, particularly with beginners. As capabilities develop, the pace can be increased appropriately.

Two of the many possible partner exercises are represented here. In both exercises only one of the partners (B) has a bokken; the partner (A) is empty-handed.

In the first exercise (picture 5), A and B face each other with the point of the extended bokken as near to A's face as A can tolerate. This threat usually affects A's breathing and posture immediately; A experiences the defensive reflex. B then raises the bokken and cuts downwards while stepping forwards. To restore the original separation, A simultaneously steps back. Throughout, A breathes

and stretches as previously practiced. A should thus develop a feeling of sovereignty, safety and freedom to act, despite this threatening situation. Then, to reverse the direction of movement, A can force B backwards by projecting energy forwards.



The second exercise can be started farther apart. B advances on A with the bokken extended forwards, raising it to cut when nearing A. Instead of collapsing, A expands, inhales deeply into her lower stomach, steps sideways and enters B's attack energetically. The previously described hand and finger positions can also be used (picture 6). Initially, A will tend to step aside rather than into the attack,

moving hastily, early and too far. However, in my experience with many non-practitioners of Aikido, almost everyone can improve their reflexes by gradually increasing the pace, and develop a new feeling of power and integrity in the face of threat.

My courses also contain diverse beneficial exercises in which both partners use a bokken, but to describe them would exceed the scope of this article.

Use of the voice is also an important way to resolve the “body schema of anxiety”. In this context, the voice is primarily a carrier of energy, rather than of meaning. As a contracted body cannot breathe deeply, its vocal expression will also be inhibited. I therefore usually take several hours in my groups to free the voice. Most participants do not initially find it easy to experiment with the directional qualities of the vowels A-E-I-O-U and to fully extend their voices while training with the bokken, but then mostly find it to be a very liberating experience. How did my Aikido master put it?

In kiai you should destroy your face, then you will be beautiful again.

Isn't it wonderful that methods from the martial arts can help us to resolve patterns of anxiety that are deeply anchored in our bodies and reflexes, in order to become truly and authentically vigorous?

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## **C) Conflict Management and Mediation**

### **Aikido and Mediation (Annette Kompa)**

1. Introduction
2. The Art of Mediation
3. The Mentioning of Aikido
4. The Spirit of Aikido
5. The Links between Aikido and Mediation

# **Aikido and Mediation**

## **(Annette Kompa)**

### **1. Introduction**

It was my deep desire to help to make this world a better place to live that motivated me to begin training to become a mediator, i.e. someone who supports people in solving their conflicts with each other. During the training, I had to read many books about constructive conflict-solving. As a longtime - Aikidoka, it was striking to me how often Aikido was mentioned in the readings. I asked myself, which aspects of Aikido are so interesting for these authors, and, in what ways are these two apparently so different ways connected? What has a martial art in common with a peaceful, communicative way of conflict resolution? Could it be that they might support each other in some ways? In the following essay, I will show you the answers that I found.

### **2. The Art of Mediation**

First I have to explain what mediation is. This method of constructive conflict-solving<sup>1</sup> was developed in the United States and came to Germany in the 80's. Mediation has been used as method separate from judicial investigation in matters of divorce, environmental conflicts, and more in the economic sector and family therapy. The process of mediation can be quickly explained: The first step (and often the most difficult one) is to get the conflict parties (two persons or two groups) at one table, willing to find a solution together. The actual meeting starts with the explanation of the process and communication rules, and after that both parties describe the conflict from their point of view. The task of the Mediator is to give both enough space to explain his or her view, and to find out what motive lies behind each perspective on the conflict. On the foundation of the motives and backgrounds, the discussion of possible solutions starts, and

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<sup>1</sup> More information about mediation can be found in: *Christoph Besemer, Mediation – Vermittlung in Konflikten* (Königsfeld, Heidelberg-Freiburg <sup>o</sup>1999).

at the end both parties come to an agreement that is recorded in a written contract.

But in the context of this essay, the process is not so important. My emphasis lies on the purpose, the attitude, and the main idea of mediation<sup>2</sup>. It sees human beings as creatures with certain needs, that are essentially the same for all (need for love, nurturance, security, respect, and so on). From this perspective, conflicts are nothing more than unfulfilled needs. The art of the mediator is to find in a careful way the injured needs behind the verbal attacks (“you have ...”, “it is your fault, that ...”) and make the affected people aware of them (by saying now: “I feel sadness/fury/... because I need ...”). Because of this process, the dialog moves away from attacking and accusation each person sees the other as expressing his needs and not as an aggressor. The avoidance of the verbal attacks creates space for the understanding of the other person’s position. It takes away the aggressive mood, convinces people to lower their weapons, and it prepares the way for thinking about solutions.

Another point is important here: solutions arrived at through mediation are much fairer than simple compromises; mediation is not just an arbitration. Mediation seeks win-win-solutions: each party in the conflict should get nearly 100% of what he or she really needs. The distinction between compromise and win-win solutions is shown clearly in the story about the two girls with one orange. The girls were fighting about the orange, and their mother decided to cut the fruit in two halves. That was a compromise. One girl took her half, ate the flesh of the fruit, and threw the peel away. The other girl used the peel of her half to bake a cake, and threw the flesh away. Both would have been more satisfied if they had communicated their needs relative to the orange. That would have been a mediation.

A successful mediation process opens the eyes of the people involved to both their own needs and the needs of the other. Without mediation, it is often the case that both parties in a conflict come from anger and accusation, focus on attacking, and hurt one another. Often the process of mediation opens a new relationship between the opponents, and they learn to handle problems in the future in another way. Mediation, in this view, is a way for all persons involved to mature through the working out of conflicts.

Both aspects of mediation undoubtedly sound familiar to Aikido practitioners. Getting off the line of attack, and flowing with the energy of the attacker (i.e. to see the other’s viewpoint and the needs behind it)? And to grow through the

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<sup>2</sup> The process of mediation that I have learned is based on the *Nonviolent Communication* of Marshall Rosenberg (*M. Rosenberg*, Nonviolent Communication, A Language of Compassion (Del Mar, CA 1999). His ideas are a major influence on this essay..

conflict (what would Aikido be without attacks)? Here we are getting closer to the elements of Aikido that are mentioned in the literature about constructive conflict solving.

### 3. The Mentioning of References to Aikido

Most of the authors of the books I have in mind were Aikido practitioners themselves. Terry Dobson, who wrote the first book of this kind, was a direct disciple of O-Sensei. He describes the Aikido-way to handle conflicts through the use of the basic Aikido-technique: the Irimi-Tenkan or Tai Sabaki (and some other authors did it either); he emphasizes two aspects of it:

“Confluence”: I get off the attacking line, so I am not a target any more, but I have still contact with my attacker (as an Aikidoka, I have open many possibilities for various techniques. As a mediator, I take my opponent’s view by looking in the same direction).

“Lead”: I have the responsibility to help my unbalanced opponent to a new balance. As an Aikidoka, I use a joint lock or a throw, and as a conflict helper I support the other in sorting things out for him or herself.

The Irimi-Tenkan is the visualisation of the purpose of Aikido and of any constructive conflict solving: to bring unbalanced energies into new harmony and balance (Ai-Ki-Do is literally “*Way of Harmonizing Energy*”). What we can also learn in Aikido and apply in mediation is the attitude toward conflict. Without an attack I can not do any Aikido; I have to welcome the attack and in most techniques I have to step toward the attacker with open arms.

The other authors refer to Aikido in a similar way, and some of them emphasize more the energy aspect. For further information, I recommend reading these interesting books, because I want to refer now to the most important discovery of my investigation:

### 4. The Spirit of Aikido

Morihei Ueshiba, the founder of Aikido, felt deeply connected to the spirit of Budo; this word means approximately “put a stop to the fighting”. The two Japanese characters have the following meaning. *Do* is the “Way” *Bu* means “martial” and is represented by two halberds crossed and hung on the wall. That signifies that the halberds are not needed, that it is a time of peace. This reflects the attitude of the martial artists after the samurai fighting techniques lost their military meaning and, under the influence of the Zen-Buddhism, became ways to develop virtuousness and human maturity.

This spirit can be found in the words of O-Sensei himself:

Budo [note: this means Aikido as well, because Ueshiba had not given his fighting system the name *Aikido* when he wrote these words, A.K.] is a sacred Way, created by the gods. It leads to truth, virtue, and beauty. It is a spiritual path which reflects the unbounded nature of the universe and the original picture of creation. Through devotion-filled practice, one can achieve virtue, and one can comprehend the principles of the heavens and earth. (*Morihei Ueshiba*, *Budo: Das Lehrbuch des Gründers des Aikido*. p. 31)

Ueshiba was a man of a deep religiosity<sup>3</sup>, and he understood Aikido in this way:

Correct your attitude concerning how the universe appears and behaves; make the fighting techniques into a practice of purity, virtue, and beauty; bind together heaven, earth, and mankind—and master this thins.

(*Morihei Ueshiba*, *Budo: Das Lehrbuch des Gründers des Aikido* p. 31)

Aikido, as Ueshiba understood it, is more than developing one's own maturity. It leads to peace and harmony in the world:

Aikido is the bridge to peace and harmony for all humankind. The first character for martial art, bu, means "to stop weapons of destruction." If its true meaning is understood by people all over the world, nothing would make me happier. The creator of this universe, which is the home for all humankind, is also the creator of aikido. The heart of Japanese budo is simply harmony and love. (*Morihei Ueshiba*, quoted from *Kisshomaru Ueshiba*, *Spirit of Aikido*, p. 120)

Aikido is still a martial art, but the aim is not fighting but peace and harmony in the world. This illustrates a last quotation of O-Sensei:

True Budo knows no enemy. True Budo is Love. It is not the purpose to kill or fight. Instead, Budo is for the purpose of supporting and realizing all that exists. Love protects and preserves life. Without love we could not achieve anything.. Aikido is an expression of love. (*Morihei Ueshiba*, quoted after *John Stevens*, „Unending Peace: The Biography of the founder of Aikido)

## 5. The Links between Aikido and Mediation

What have Aikido and mediation in common? Where are they linked? Hopefully the statement above has given some hints about it. I would like to outline an answer and focus on three aspects:

Conflicts are not only problems, they can be seen as opportunities to grow and mature. In every-day life this attitude is not normal but self-remembering at Aikido practice can help to get into this attitude: Aikidokas need uke's attack to

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<sup>3</sup> More of the spirituality of Morihei Ueshiba can be found in: *Ueshiba, K. (1984) The Spirit of Aikido*. Tokyo, New York, London: Kodansha International.

execute a technique, and they generally execute the movements with open hands and open arms. This is how conflicts should be seen in a mediation process: not as something to avoid but as something to grow from.

The abstract process of discovering the motifs and needs behind the conflicts can be well illustrated by the Irimi-Tenkan: not answering an attack with another attack, but working with the energy of it; moving to the side of one of the participants to see how things look from his point of view. In the mediation process, the mediator takes all the opponents, one after another into Irimi-Tenkan movement; and then to lower the accusations and to reach an understanding and the readiness to find a solution.

Last but not least, Aikido and mediation have the same aim: to support people in growing through conflicts and to help to make the world a better place to life.

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# **Friend or Foe?**

## **Aiki Reframing as a Mode of Reality Construction<sup>1</sup>**

### **(Peter Schettgen)**

1. Introduction
2. Extending Aikido to Conflict Management
  - 2.1. General Considerations
  - 2.2. A Cycle Model of Conflict Management
  - 2.3. Transfer Levels
3. Aiki Reframing: Use the Freedom of Thoughts!
4. Conclusion: “Let’s Pretend”

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<sup>1</sup> This article is a short version of a German text first published as „Freund oder Feind? Wie Wirklichkeitskonstruktionen unseren Umgang mit Konflikten steuern“ in Schettgen, P. (Ed.) 2002, „Kreativität statt Kampf! Aikido-Erweiterungen in Theorie und Praxis“ (p. 106-133), Augsburg, Ziel-Verlag.

# Friend or Foe? Aiki Reframing as a Mode of Reality Construction

## (Peter Schettgen)

*“Take the enemy into your heart”* (Morihei Uyeshiba)

### 1. Introduction

On September 23, 2002, I received an Email from the Founder of Aiki Extensions, Donald Levine, in which he quoted from an article in the Chicago Tribune:

“To hate is human. Humans need enemies for the sake of their self-definition and motivation’. So writes Samuel Huntington, in a noted book on the supposed clash between Western and Islamic civilizations. His reliance on the friend-enemy dualism was repeated in our President's rush to define/dignify a group of international outlaws as enemy warriors, thereby making good on one promissory note of his campaign: ‘When I grew up, it was Us against Them, and it was clear who They were. Today we are not so certain who They are; but we know that They are there’” (Chicago Tribune, 31 Jan, 2000).

Don Levine commented:

“Many people do indeed think that in order to have personal integrity or get ‘psyched up’ they have to relate combatively to others – whether the enemy be ‘inferior’ groups, authorities, family members, or collectivities that are simply ‘different’. One of Ueshiba Morihei Sensei's most radical ideas was that in the Martial Way he sought to cultivate, ‘there are no enemies.’ On the mat, we pursue that Way in a mutually respectful environment in which, before attacking a partner or receiving an attack, we say ‘Onegai shimasu’.”

Don Levine illustrated the deeper meaning of “Onegai shimasu” with a quotation from Frank Doran, a well-known Aikido instructor. This statement is included in the training handbook of the University of Chicago Aikido Club:

*“Onegai shimasu* is the request we make each time we bow to a partner. It's a request for our partner's attention, to study their balance and ours. So that we can each discover the security and stability that is possible in movement. It's a request for honesty in attack. So that we can learn to be honest in our response, both with

ourselves and with others. It's a request for patience with both our weaknesses and our strengths. Because we need to experience both. And it's a request to meet our anger and frustration with compassion. So that we can learn – out of the experience of compassion in the face of rage – to love. We make these requests each time we train.”

## 2. Extending Aikido to Conflict Management

In this section, I will demonstrate how I work with Aiki Extensions in the field of conflict management training.

My understanding is that Aiki Extensions work is guided by three fundamental ideas. First, what is transferable are the abstract Aikido *principles* (like irimi, tenkan, ma-ai, ki-no-musubi, hara etc.), not the concrete defense techniques (like ikkyo, nikkyo, sankyo, shihonage etc.). Techniques are just vehicles for practicing the principles. Second, Aiki Extensions uses the *body as the locus, form and medium of experiential learning*. And third, learning is based on *reality construction* – learning means to see new facts or to see old facts in a new way. Generally speaking, in order for Aiki to be successfully transferred to new areas of application, these three ideas are fundamental.

### 2.1. General Considerations

In extending Aikido to the field of conflict management, one has to demonstrate how Aikido principles match the conception of conflict resolution as it is described in scientific research. One has to make this matching clear and intelligible. Therefore, the “aiki extender” has to show how he or she conceives of conflict and under which conditions Aikido is likely to help resolve conflicts.

Usually, in my leadership trainings, I start with Thomas Crum’s definition of conflict (1988, p. 49):

“Conflict is just an interference pattern of energies”. This definition is wide enough to cover different types of conflict which can be discussed with the workshop participants: cognitive, socio-emotional, motivational, distributional, overt vs. covert, intra- and interpersonal, structural conflicts etc. Then I continue with the statement that Aikido is not a wonder weapon or a universal remedy which is able to deal with all kinds of conflict. Nevertheless, Aikido seems to be an appropriate and promising approach in managing *overt* and *socio-emotional* conflicts whether they are *intraindividual* or *interpersonal* in nature. Moreover, to apply Aikido principles, one should be the *target of an unprovoked (physical or verbal) attack* (Dobson & Miller, 1993).

There are a number of elements that are important in defining the role of Aikido principles in conflict resolution. First, Aikido principles can be used only with overt, manifested conflicts. If conflicts are covert or unexpressed, there is no

clear incoming energy which can be deflected and redirected by the “aiki defender.”

Second, socio-emotional conflicts carry more energy than cognitive or other types of “rational” conflict (e.g., a conflict of interest in an organization which is acted out strategically, without any emotional attachment). Emotions such as anger, fear or despair are charged highly with energy - and this emotional energy behind an attack is needed as an input into the conflict management process structured by the principles of Aikido.

Third, when emotions are involved in the conflict, it doesn't matter if the attack is physical or verbal in nature. One can deal with verbal and physical attacks in a similar way.

Fourth, the typical training situation in the Aikido dojo is such that somebody receives an attack which has not been provoked. The philosophy of Aikido emphasizes that one shouldn't behave aggressively or violently, thereby eliciting aggression of others. Consequently, extending this scenario to conflict settings outside the dojo means that the application of Aikido principles is restricted to cases where one is the target, not the perpetrator, of aggression.

Fifth, the conflicts with which Aikido deals may be internal or external. As an Aikido practitioner, I can experience conflict inside of myself in the form of an inner dialogue (e.g., one inner voice says: “Stay calm! Trust yourself! You will cope with the attack effectively and control the situation”, and another inner voice responds: “The attacker is too fast and too strong for you! You will be hit and suffer damage! Your fear is absolutely justified!”). Or I can experience external conflict in the physical confrontation between Uke (attacker) and Nage (defender).

Sixth, in the dojo situation, we interact with real persons, whether they are ourselves or our training partners. Therefore, it makes sense to extend Aikido only to intraindividual or interpersonal conflict, whereas conflicts caused by abstract or anonymous social conditions (rules, procedures, hierarchy, distribution of power, stratification etc.) cannot be approached by Aikido easily.

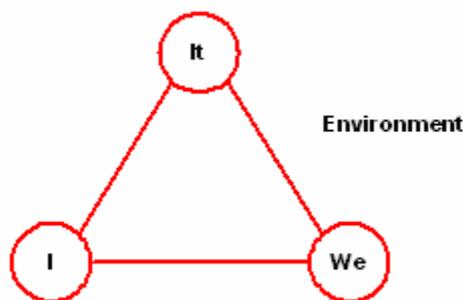
## **2.2. A Cycle Model of Conflict Management**

Since 1990, I presented more than 100 leadership trainings (requested by firms such as DaimlerChrysler, Schoeller, Compaq Computers, DASA, Giesecke & Devrient, AOK). Around 60 of my seminars dealt with Aiki extensional work, mainly done in the field of conflict management. From my experience, managers, supervisors and leaders – as participants of professional trainings – want to learn simple and easy to comprehend concepts. In addition, they aim at having rapid success in transferring the learned concepts to typical problem

situations of their daily work in organizations. They wish to experience quick results and improvements. Therefore, in the year 2000, I started to use a simple model of conflict management in my leadership trainings. It has a round, cyclic structure and – because of its “gestalt” – seems to be appropriate for visualizing the affinity between conflict management activities and the spherical movements of Aikido.

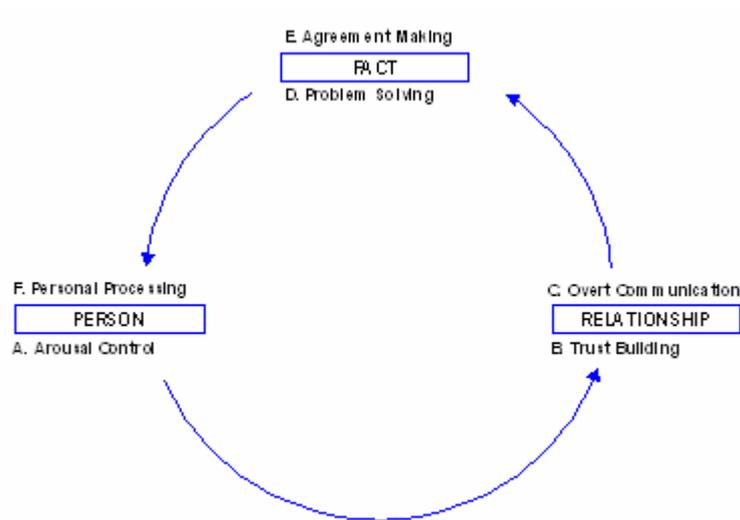
The core of the model parallels the assumptions of the so called “theme centered interaction”. (In German that is “Themenzentrierte Interaktion”, the same three words as in English, and I will use the German abbreviation TZI). TZI is a communication paradigm originally developed by the Swiss psychologist Ruth Cohn (1980). According to this model, there are four components which constitute a communicative situation:

- “I”: subjective needs, interests, wishes, feelings, sensations, attitudes, expectations...
- “We”: group norms and dynamics, values, rules, interactions, rituals, cohesion...
- “It”: the facts, tasks, themes, topics, problems, objectives, projects...
- “Environment”: the physical and cultural situation which surrounds the interactions.



*Fig. 1: Basic Components of Theme Centered Interaction*

The model is concerned with “balance”. That means, communication will be optimal and efficient if the four components are brought into harmonious relationships. Again, the similarity between the concept of balance in communication and the deeper meaning of “Ai” in Aikido is obvious since Aikido is also interested in the development of inner and outer balance.



*Fig. 2: Cycle Model of Conflict Management (after Berkel, 1995, p. 78)*

The German psychologist Karl Berkel (1995) used the fundamental structure of TZI as a platform to model the relationships between the central components in a conflict management process. His diversification and differentiation of the original TZI model is appropriate for discovery of several Aikido analogies (comp. Fig. 2).

First, according to a well-known statement of the social psychologist Kurt Lewin “Real is, what has an effect”. That is, the beginning of conflict is inside of me: conflict is real when I experience a conflict in my body. There are a lot of stress symptoms which indicate that I’m experiencing conflict, e.g. faster pulse, higher heart rate, constriction of breath, higher muscle tonus, intensive sweat production etc. (Compare Paul Linden’s article in this book). These symptoms indicate that I have lost my balance. Consequently, the first step in conflict management is to restore balance. If we are balanced, we are not so likely to be provoked by others or to become involved in social conflicts. In turn, our balance has calming effects on the arousal status of an attacker. Therefore, being balanced is the best precondition to deal with a social conflict situation and to avoid the escalation of conflict.

Second, TZI argues that “social relations have priority over facts”: If we have brought ourselves into balance, we are able to establish good contact with the opponent. We should build trust and facilitate an overt and honest (not covert or strategic) communication. Again, the parallels with Aikido are evident: In Aikido, one tries to meet another person by moving into a “harmonious distance” and finding a “common center” from which the continuation of the movement can take place. This common movement aims at dealing with a problematic situation cooperatively.

Third, if the relationship is stabilized and has become free from excessive emotions, one can go on to treat the “facts”. Whatever the “fact” is, it is the result of a common definition of the problems that need to be solved. If the relationship has been adjusted, the conflict partners are able to unite their efforts. They can look together for causes or reasons behind an expressed aggression: What frustration has led to aggression? What needs or wishes have been frustrated? This search does not aim at finding the “true” problems, but at sharing a definition of the problem situation based on consensus and, consequently, at solving the problems in a synergetic way. Moreover, if one touches the deeper level of motives behind the surface of aggression, he or she is able to work with positive, constructive forces which can be used for necessary changes. For example, a person may be aggressive because his or her need for approval has been frustrated. If one is able to communicate with that need instead of dealing with the aggression, one can psychologically “turn around” the situation toward more positive perspectives and outcomes. One can look for the reasons why a need has been frustrated, eliminate the barriers which hindered the satisfaction of the need or search for alternative ways to satisfy the need.

Fourth, from the level of “facts” we come back to the “person”. Whatever happened in relation to the social level of interaction or to the dealing with facts, it has to be processed (“digested”) personally, subjectively. Congruent with Far East Martial Arts philosophy, the conflict ends within the person where it started.

Because Berkel’s model is appropriate for embedding several Aikido principles in the broader frame of reference of conflict management, I adapted and refined it to arrange a *systematic exposition of Aikido principles*. Using Berkel’s model allows me to show *how Aikido principles relate to certain sections of the conflict management process*.

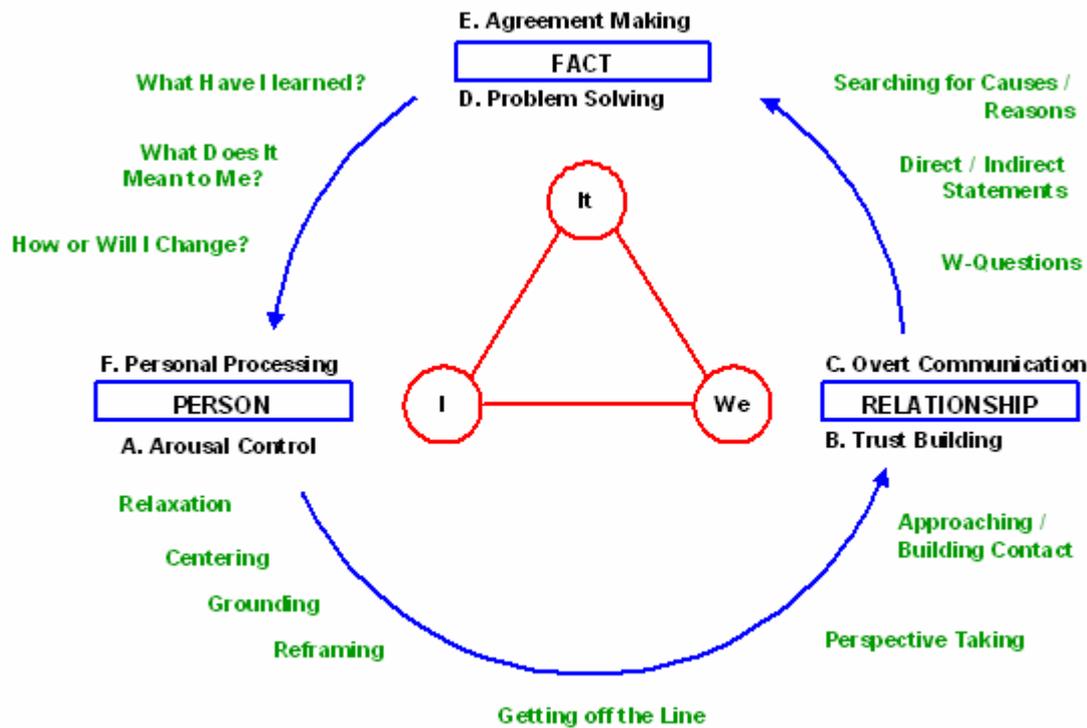


Fig. 3: Aikido Principles within the Cycle of Conflict Management

**Person: A. Arousal Control.** Cooling down and restoring balance are accomplished well by the use of four fundamental Aikido body exercises: relaxation, centering, grounding and reframing:

- *Relaxation* means reducing unnecessary muscular tension in the body. Excessive tension is often a result of unconscious psychological defense mechanisms. When these defense mechanisms are maintained on a long-term basis, they often manifest in chronic tenseness (compare Wilhelm Reich's concept of "body armoring"). Congruent with an important law of Martial Arts philosophy which states that "only a relaxed movement is a powerful movement", a relaxed body is a source of optimal psychological power and resilience, which are both required to handle conflicts effectively. To relax the body, I use the shaking massage methods of Shiatsu, which are often used as a part of the warm ups in Aikido training to let the participants experience very deep levels of relaxation.
- *Centering* is the process of choosing the appropriate degree of muscle tonus which is needed in a situation. Too much tension for a given task leads to stiffness and inability. Too little leads to limpness and weakness. Instead, centering produces an optimal mixture of psychophysiological flexibility and stability by bringing together physical, emotional and mental energies. Centering can be used to regulate bubbling emotions, to get rid of corresponding

Fight-Flight-Freeze-(FFF)-reactions and to generate a conscious choice between alternatives of action, i.e. to acquire more degrees of freedom. In sum, centering can be defined as maintaining a balance between inner awareness for self-regulation and outer focused awareness for action.

- *Grounding* describes the process of leading the attention to the ground. Martial arts philosophy states that “energy follows attention.” Consequently, the result of leading the attention to the ground is a better standing and a feeling of being “rooted” in the earth. Note, that the hazard of excessive grounding is inflexibility.

- *Reframing* means using a new perspective on or interpretation of one’s situation. Reframing is a powerful mental instrument to defuse the threatening character of conflicts by making them subjectively more acceptable. In addition, reframing leads to mental flexibility and the ability to get beyond stuck points in the conflict and see new options for action. (More information about reframing can be found in the next chapter.)

**From the Person to the Relationship: B. Trust Building.** During this stage of the conflict management process the irimi-tenkan-movement of Aikido will be employed as a body metaphor for dealing with verbal conflict situations. The irimi-tenkan-movement involves the following steps:

- *getting off the line* of attack symbolizes not taking a conflict personally, thereby maintaining self-esteem;

- *perspective taking* is reflected in the tenkan movement and is based on the complete acceptance of the attacker’s feelings. The core statement of perspective taking is “the attacker is one hundred percent right” – not with what s/he is saying or doing, but with what s/he is feeling;

- the essence of the irimi movement in Aikido means *approaching the opponent*, building contact and a good relationship with him.

**From the Relationship to the Fact: C. Overt Communication and D.**

**Problem Solving.** As before, the guiding principles of Aikido can be transferred to a verbal dispute. An attacker will lose his or her balance, if he or she doesn’t find resistance or a defender’s reaction which fits his or her expectation. From that point on – in Aikido – the defender (Nage) will control the momentum of attack in spiral, cyclic or spherical movements. Likewise, one can understand and manage the causes or reasons underlying a verbal attack by

- *asking questions*: Where? When? What? Which? Who? How? Etc. According to the principle “He who asks, leads,” communicative situations are strongly influenced and directed by questions. The only question which is not allowed is “why,” e.g. “why are you angry?” Why-questions elicit resistance and provoke justifications from the opponent, which are not helpful in finding the

“true” reasons for aggression.

- *Making direct or indirect statements:* “Please, tell me...” (directly). “I’d like to know...” (indirectly). With such statements the attacker is asked to disclose him- or herself. Of course, direct statements are more likely to produce resistance than indirect ones.

**From the Fact back to the Person: E. Agreement Making and F. Personal Processing.** By the time we reach the level of “facts”, the parties involved in a conflict or dispute have already made it through a complex learning process. As a result of the previous steps, the attribution of hostility which, in general, tends to escalate conflict, could be displaced by the repeated experience of friendliness during the conversation, and that is likely to foster cooperation and constructive problem solving. The common problem solving will result in the making of agreements or (psychological) contracts which reflect the honest attempt of the conflict partners to get along with each other and/or to become reconciled. After the making of agreements, each conflict partner has to reflect and/or subjectively process the effects of the conflict regulation on him- or herself. Central questions which have to be answered “privately” after the “public” peace has been made are, for example:

- *What did I experience and learn?*
- *What does it mean to me?*
- *How or will I change?*

*In sum:* Integrating Aikido into conflict management training is a gain because the body can be used as a medium of learning. That is important since we are never involved in conflicts in a purely intellectual way, but also physically, sensorially, emotionally. Overwhelming emotions often hinder a rational or in some way more “realistic” conflict management. The key problem in conflict management is how to maintain a psychology of rationality and good will as the foundation for resolving the conflict – as the events of the latest war between the USA and Iraq show dramatically, for example.

### 2.3. Transfer Levels

As indicated above, Aikido offers a rich repertoire of body methods and techniques with which students are able to regulate physiological and emotional processes consciously. For example, Aikido techniques are helpful to reduce stress both on the individual and social level. They are supportive in creating new habits by transferring the body experiences which have been acquired by training to everyday life.

By using the modified model of Berkel (1995), the participants in my conflict

management trainings acquire in a stepwise manner a deeper understanding of the links between Aikido and the process of conflict resolution. They never lose orientation because the cycle model of conflict management shows the role which Aikido body methods play in the context of conflict resolution. This is important because participants in conflict management training are not Aikido fans or even practitioners, in general. Many analogies and parallels between Aikido and conflict resolution which are obvious and clear for Aikido practitioners at first glance are not so comprehensible for people without Aikido experience and therefore need thorough explanation.

There are at least two further levels of application of Aikido to the process of conflict management. The first is based on the *body experience* itself and the installation of new habits of body perception and body awareness. One has to establish rituals or disciplines in order to practice and strengthen the newly acquired body skills in everyday life (for example, centering yourself every time a telephone call comes into your office).

Second, application can be enhanced by making use of *body metaphors and analogies*. For example, the irimi-tenkan movement is a powerful tool, because it can be read like a text which has to be translated from body language to a verbal message. For my leadership trainings, I developed *Aikicom* (which is short for “Aikido communication”) to model the relations between Aikido movements and verbal communication in conflict situations. In more detail, I broke the irimi-tenkan movement into five meaningful sections (attack; getting off the line; building contact; perspective taking; and leading), and have the participants produce equivalent sentences which can be used to manage a verbal conflict situation – statements, which fit the participants personally and their organizational cultures. After modeling *Aikicom* in general, the participants are asked to role play meaningful conflicts from their professional life, thereby utilizing *Aikicom* in practice and improving their communicative skills.

Finally, we should never forget that transfer of Aikido principles is always *bidirectional*: from the dojo to everyday life and back from everyday life to the dojo! As a result of this interdependence, the experiences we gain in everyday life and in the dojo challenge each other and produce important impulses for personal growth.

### **3. Aiki Reframing: Use the Freedom of Thoughts!**

In this section, I will select one principle of Aikido – which I call “reframing” – and describe in more detail how I extend Aiki reframing to the context of conflict management.

From my point of view, reframing means to work with the powers of

imagination. Imagination is the foundation for all human advances. For example, in mankind's history, people imagined that they could fly, live under water, or talk with each other over long distances, and now we are able to do so. Reframing is based on the possibility that things are not what they seem to be or that they could be another way. We ourselves define "what is real." If you are not attached to a certain perception of a given situation, you are able to use the freedom which results from that to apply other frames, perspectives and even actions (see Box 1).

In Budo, we work very often with mental images. The Japanese word "ki" is sometimes taken to be synonymous with "mental power," and a part of this mental force is the power of imagination. By centering, for example, you achieve a state of attention without tension. However, the center is nothing else but an imagined point about four fingers below your navel! Because there is no mind-body separation in far eastern philosophy, it is understood that a change of mental activities will influence our physical and emotional processes. It is remarkable that centering as a mental exercise also enhances physical stability and emotional balance.

Another rule in Budo states that "energy follows attention". That means, our attention follows our mental activities, or – more precisely – our intention (compare Paul Linden's article in this book). We have a remarkable capacity to control our attention by our will. We are the "pilots" of our mental activities. Clarity and unambiguity are virtues which are central to Budo and all of life and which refer to the centrality and meaningfulness of the mental organization for powerful and decisive actions.

The hostess met us at the door, took our coats, and ushered us into the warm, candlelit dining room. Jim and I had been looking forward to a quiet evening out. As I sat down and heard the piercing cry of a baby at the table directly across the aisle, my mood plummeted. I immediately became uncentered, judgmental, and angry, wondering why anyone would bring a baby to a place like this.

Luckily, though I had lost my center, my husband had not. He leaned over and quietly suggested we play a little game of pretend. Let's pretend we're on a planet, he said, where babies are honored, revered, and considered to be extremely lucky. They are incredibly powerful beings, and to be seated near one in a public place is a sign of immense good fortune. On this planet we were the luckiest people in the room.

The most extraordinary part of the transformation was that it took no time. I was on one planet, then I was on another, a remarkable place - delightful, carefree, lovely. It was so much more pleasant. I was so much more pleasant. It was as if I were the child, playing, discovering, fascinated with everything and everyone.

"Let's Pretend" is a game we played as children and continue to play as adults, but we forget we're playing. That night we decided to pretend on purpose, and everything changed. With that little experiment, we learned that we can create our perception of reality from moment to moment.

What planet are you on at the moment? Can you pretend that the irritation is actually a gift in your life? What if it really is?

*Box 1: On this Planet (Judy Ringer, Aiki Works Trainer, June Centering Hint 2003)*

In conflict situations, reframing helps us to reduce stress and overcome fixations in problem solving. Instead of "more of the same," we are able to view a given situation from a new perspective and, thereby, start to find new approaches for dealing with it. Before going to solve a problem, make sure that you dissolve the problem: Detach yourself from the problem, and then deal with it, because otherwise you will continue to be a part of the problem. Reframing supports the acceptance of a situation. The fundamental divergence in thinking between western and far eastern cultures is nowhere so drastically shown as in dealing with conflicts: In our western cultures, we tend to (often aggressively) change the situation until it is acceptable to us, while in far eastern cultures, people accept the situation in order to change it.

My Aikido teacher, Watanabe Nobuyuki Sensei, often states that “you have to generate yourself” or “you have to work with the air between you and the attacker” – thereby employing reframing techniques. I want to show some further examples of Aiki reframing which I collected during the years of my training with different teachers and, in addition, from the literature:

- An opponent is not a foe, but a friend.
- An attack is an energy gift.
- An attack is a request for being embraced.
- Giving in is not a sign of weakness, but of strength.
- Threat should be treated with curiosity, not with fear.
- Seek to become close to, not distant from, an attacker – get connected!
- Conflict: What an opportunity for change, learning and growing!

These interpretations aim at a positive, constructive way of dealing with conflict situations. The attitude is well disposed and favors a quality of connection which is characterized by closeness and sympathy. By being friendly, one is able to create surprise on part of the attacker, because an attacker can cope with FFF-reactions but wouldn't expect to be loved or accepted. As a result, the momentum of attack is interrupted, thereby offering a new starting point for other modes of exchange and for channeling aggression towards active problem solving: “He who has kindness will be victorious in fighting and invincible in defense” (Laotse, Tao Te King).

We do not know, in general, if man is evil (“homo homini lupus”, Thomas Hobbes, 1588-1679) or if he is good by nature (“homo homini deus”, Benediktus Spinoza, 1632-1677). All we know is that man is free to choose his assumptions about the world and that self fulfilling prophecies lead to the results we expect. Reframing means using human freedom to achieve desirable results. If we view an opponent as a foe, we will induce a FFF-behavior which fosters an escalation of conflict. If we view an opponent as a friend, we will get an opportunity to approach, to build trust and to facilitate a cooperative way of dealing with a conflict situation.

*Figure 4: Aikido: Treat Your Foe as a Friend (Photos: Axel Weiss, Augsburg, Germany)*



*Fig. 4.1*



*Fig. 4.2*



*Fig. 4.3*



*Fig. 4-4*

#### 4. Conclusion: “Let’s Pretend”

A bumble-bee pretends that it is able to fly. Of course, from a physicist’s point of view, it cannot, but it doesn’t know and just flies. An ant pretends that it is able to lift an object which weighs ten times as much as its own body – and it works, because an ant isn’t informed about the laws of nature. The aborigines throw a crooked piece of wood in the air and they are confident, that it will return back to them – they are not interested in scientific explanations, and empirically there is not one scientist who is able to explain how that kind of movement works. In scientific as well as in common language, the phenomenon is just called “boomerang effect”.

As neurophysiological research shows, the largest part of human information processing is dealing with itself (Siebert, 2003): Over 90% of our information input stems from feedback loops within our brains. In other words, a huge amount of our conversation is, indeed, monologue. Most of the time we are talking with ourselves. Consequently, we ourselves construct our realities – of course, we can be irritated by our environments, but we are by nature self-referential and self-generating (“autopoetic”) systems, and, therefore, we produce our “own worlds,” which we live in.

This situation is well reflected in an anecdote: A Balloonist has lost his orientation. He sees a farmer below his balloon and asks him, “Where I am?” And the farmer answers: “In a balloon!”

If we discover differences, especially “differences that make a difference” (Gregory Bateson), we are likely to say: “well, that’s interesting,” and we are going to learn by establishing new relations and connections between perceived facts. Therefore, irritations enhance learning. This kind of learning empowered by irritations should have consequences for teaching and the arrangement of learning settings. As an old English saying goes: “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink”. That means, adults are usually capable of learning, but you can’t tell them anything. Far eastern philosophy covers this issue in a well known Zen story: The student came to the Zen master and asked: “Please, be my teacher!” The master answered: “I cannot teach you anything. I can only show you, how to discover it in yourself!” In this sense, O’Sensei Uyeshiba was rather a good teacher: He irritated the Budo community with his statement: “Take the enemy into your heart”. To view other people as foes or as friends is a very interesting difference. Whether we follow O’Sensei’s recommendation and are willing to view other people as friends depends on us. What we should learn as Aikido teachers, is to conceive of the dojo as an environment of experiential learning where students find the opportunity to become irritated by Aiki reframes for dealing with typical conflict situations.

This kind of teaching and learning should also be part of Aiki Extensions work in applying Aikido outside and beyond the traditional dojo.

Finally, I'd like to invite you to a funny game with the name "Let's pretend": Let's pretend we are living on a planet where our foes are our best friends. On this planet our foes challenge us to go beyond our limits and to exceed them. They motivate us to mobilize our power, to discover and unfold new, unseen potentials in ourselves. Our foes keep us alert and active. They support our ability to perceive more precisely, and they teach us to be present, patient and attentive. Can you pretend that a foe is a gift in your life? What if he really is?

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## **D) Personal Growth and Social Development**

### **Preventing Violence and Managing Conflicts – The Path of Aikido and Taekwondo (Ernst Friedrich, Michael Pest, Stephan Daniel Richter & Gerd Seligmann)**

1. Preventing Violence and Martial Arts - a Paradox?
2. Philosophical-spiritual Aspects of Aikido
3. The Glass is Half Full or Half Empty – Psychology and Do
4. If You Do not Dare to Try, You Do not Love, but Destroy - Sources of Violence and Misunderstanding
5. The path is the goal
  - 5.1. The Contribution of Martial Arts to Personality Development
  - 5.2. Sword Work as a Way to Resolve Conflicts
  - 5.3. Principles of Martial Arts and Resolving Conflicts
  - 5.4. Preventing Violence and Experiencing the Role of a Victim
  - 5.5. Rules and “Erlebnispädagogik”
6. Martial Arts – Managing Conflicts – Prevention of Violence

# **Preventing Violence and Managing Conflicts – The Path of Aikido and Taekwondo (Ernst Friedrich, Michael Pest, Stephan Daniel Richter & Gerd Seligmann)**

(English Translation by Wendy Hecker, Munich)

## **1. Preventing Violence and Martial Arts - a Paradox?**

“With martial arts don’t you show young people, who are already destructive, new and better tricks to act out their aggressive tendencies even more effectively?” We are often asked this or similar questions, when we tell someone that we use elements of martial arts to prevent violence.

Our notions about Asian martial arts usually come from action films, and, when we think about Karate, Aikido, Taekwondo, Kung Fu, etc., we think first of all about sophisticated martial arts techniques, about aggressive superiority and about the destructive power upon which, at first sight, they seem to be based. Many people do not know or cannot understand that martial arts can become another kind of path, one concerned with positive personality development and the goal of reducing aggression. So, what is it all about? How can martial arts reduce aggression instead of increasing it?

Taekwondo and Aikido belong to the Asian martial arts and to its traditions of the “*do*” – (path) -. When we examine them more closely, we can see that due to their Eastern background they are not comparable to our Western view of combative training or competitive sports and are not primarily programs that teach the trainee how to fight like a military combatant or to effectively eliminate an opponent. They have to be seen in the context of a totally different culture, a different way of thinking with a different goal. Whereas our Western culture and our concepts are characterized by analytical, scientific and economic paradigms that are also inseparably linked with achievement and competition (comp. Friedrich 2001, p. 213ff), far Eastern thinking is holistic, based on “wholeness”, as in the unity of mind and body. Learning and practicing- such as the learning and practicing in Aikido and Taekwondo - are characterized, like everything else in Asian thinking, by this concept. It is our intent not to speak about combative sports but about martial arts.

The term martial arts itself implies that in general martial arts have to do with *art*. In Eastern arts, such as the traditions of flower arranging, the tea ceremony, watercolor painting, the aim is not primarily to master a “skill”, but, more holistically, emphasis is placed upon the “*inner transformation*” that can be attained by “practicing the particular art” (Müller 2002, p. 91) At this point Müller says:

The Japanese word “do” comes from Zen Buddhism, and it depicts a way, path, principle, life, philosophy, direction, method and also describes one principle of the Asian philosophy of life “<sup>1</sup>”.

He also cites Lind (1992, S. 15):

*Do* is a path in the center of which is a practice... whose goal is not to learn skills but rather to increase the individual’s inherent potential so that he can grow into his destiny and fill his life with consciousness and knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

Through practice a person can achieve “inner transformation”. This is connected to the “battle for personal maturity”, with the practice that challenges a person to develop (Müller 2002, p. 91). In this context the battle is with oneself and not combat aimed at annihilating an opponent. The battle is fought in order to overcome and thus find oneself. One uses martial techniques, but one addresses the Ego. In this way selfishness and the egotistical pursuit of external glamour are to be overcome and transformed into a more humble yet freer, healthier and tranquil life that is characterized by inner equilibrium and stability (Ibid).

## 2. Philosophical-spiritual Aspects of Aikido

What Ueshiba sees as being Aikido is written down in the thoughts of André Nocquet (1985):

Aiki-do is the path of harmony between individuals and the universe. (...) The spirit of Aikido is to protect LOVE. (p. 47)

Aiki-do is the path of freedom. The realization of LOVE. (...) Aiki-do deals with the universe – and that is the most important thing in the world – but it is not a religion. One can say, however, that Aiki-do has one thing in common with the teachings of Christ – LOVE. (p. 49)

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1 “Das japanische Wort ‚do‘ stammt aus dem Zen-Buddhismus, bedeutet Weg, Pfad, Grundsatz, Leben, Philosophie, Richtung, Methode und bezeichnet ein Prinzip der asiatischen Weltanschauung.“

2 “Do ist ein Weg, in dessen Zentrum eine Übung ... steht, deren Ziel jedoch nicht das Erlernen irgendeiner Fertigkeit, sondern das Erweitern des im Menschen liegenden Potentials ist, durch das er zu seiner Sinnbestimmung wachsen und sein Leben mit Bewusstsein und Erkenntnis erfüllen kann.“

This world is grandly constructed. We need to act in such a way that the peaceful condition present in Heaven will be mirrored on Earth, namely by becoming a united family, living together in peace. (p. 51)

If an opponent attacks, if, as it were, “materialism” between two individuals shows itself, the physically stronger usually wins. This is a relative victory; but in Aiki the important thing is to win an absolute victory of no resistance, of courage, intelligence, love and brotherhood. True self-defense is not merely learning and using physical techniques; it is primarily the complete transformation of the spirit. (p. 55)

The true path in martial arts does not merely consist of putting the opponent out of commission but rather in leading him in such a manner that he voluntarily gives up his hostile attitude. (...) In martial arts the goal of the PATH is FRIENDSHIP. (p. 61)<sup>3</sup>

The meaning of Ueshiba’s statements on preventing violence and conflict management is clear. Practice on the mat or in the Dojo has not only the short-term goal of annihilating an opponent; it is also concerned with the reconciliation of opposites, with permitting the spirit of love to be active and standing up to aggression in a firm manner that is also unfettered and kind. Penetrating to Aikido’s most deeply rooted center is not an intellectual task; it is a matter of (daily) practice and exercise (comp. Schwarzmayr 2003, p. 86) Ueshiba himself says provokingly:

Do not concern yourselves with books about Aiki-do, for they are unable to make you sense the essence of this art and its spiritual aspect. (Nocquet 1985, p. 63).

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3 “Aiki-do ist der Weg der Harmonie zwischen Mensch und Universum. [...] Der Geist des Aiki-do ist es, die LIEBE zu beschützen.” (S. 47)

“Aiki-do ist der Weg des Friedens. Die Verwirklichung der LIEBE. [...] Aiki-do befasst sich mit dem Universum – und das ist die wichtigste Sache in der Welt – aber es ist keine Religion. Man kann allerdings sagen, dass Aiki-do einen Punkt mit der Lehre Christi gemein hat – die LIEBE.“ (S. 49)

“Der Bau dieser Welt ist großartig. Wir müssen so handeln, dass sich der friedvolle Zustand des Himmels auf der Erde widerspiegelt, indem wir eine vereinte Familie bilden und miteinander in Frieden leben.“ (S. 51)

“Wenn der Gegner angreift, wenn sozusagen das »Materielle« zwischen zwei Menschen sich offenbart, gewinnt gewöhnlich der physisch Stärkere. Das ist ein relativer Sieg; doch im Aiki geht es darum, den absoluten Sieg der Widerstandslosigkeit, des Mutes, der Intelligenz, der Liebe und der Brüderlichkeit zu erringen. Wahre Selbstverteidigung ist nicht allein das Erlernen und Anwenden körperlicher Techniken, sie ist vor allem die völlige Veränderung des Geistes.“ (S. 55)

“Der wahre Weg der Kampfkunst besteht nicht allein darin, den Feind unschädlich zu machen, sondern vielmehr darin, ihn so zu führen, dass er freiwillig seine feindliche Einstellung aufgibt. [...] Das Ziel des WEGES der Kampfkunst ist die FREUNDSCHAFT.“ (S. 61)

In addition, his son points out that the essence of Aikido (and similar *Do* paths) must be individually, concretely experienced (comp. Ueshiba 1993, p. 111).

This attitude, strived for by means of practicing Aikido is closely tied up to that which in the Western world we term “development of a greater degree of personal maturity” or, stated in psychological terms, with a never-ending “learning process of individual self-realization” (Heimler 1997, p. 103).

### **3. The Glass is Half Full or Half Empty – Psychology and Do**

At this point we want to look more closely at what is behind these high-minded goals of peacefulness and capacity to love, “greater personal maturity” or advanced state of self-realized development. How can this be understood in the context of everyday life? Which path of personal development is connected to it?

All of us are familiar with the image of a glass that is half full. For one person this glass is always half *empty*, and he deplors this situation, complaining that other people generally have more, whereas his glass is only half full. In the end the other people, who have more, might even be held responsible for this person’s misery. A person like this will tend to criticize others, to make them look bad or else, at the cost of others, try to put himself in a better light. Or else this person might continue to remain a victim of his own insecurity. In this case we might speak about an existence led in a *deficient mode*. Deficiency and lack of fulfillment characterize his feelings, awareness and behavior. This existence is looking for compensation (comp. Knapp 1988, p. 87ff).

For another person the glass is half *full*. He is not looking at the ways he might be deficient in comparison to others. He is happy with what he has and enjoys it (comp. concept of “reframing” in Schettgen 2003, p. 120ff). A person who has this attitude will succeed in seeing others in a positive light, of refraining from criticism, and living a life of compassion, love, esteem and respect for life and nature. He will experience and live life fully, being completely present – loving and respecting everything and each moment. This is existence lived in *the positive, affirmative mode* where a positive sense of self, aliveness, confidence, satisfaction, energy, certainty characterize emotions, attitudes, awareness and behavior (comp. Knapp 1988, p. 84).

This kind of positive attitude requires a stable and well-developed “Self”. In his comprehensive psychological concept “Giving the meaning of life a future” Csikszentmihalyi describes the path there as follows (comp. 1995, p. 304): The child self is still focused on the satisfaction of physical needs, such as food, protection, support etc. Although these needs continue to be important, as

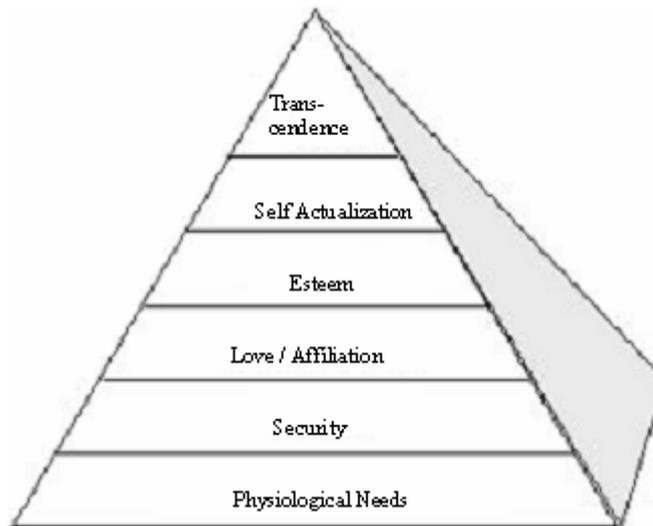
development continues, a new set of values begins to form, arising from the need to be accepted, loved and valued. At this stage, the individual begins to integrate himself into the community and follow its rules. Finally the self reaches a place where it is no longer merely interested in having others satisfy his needs, but rather increasingly focused on fulfillment through self-realization. In this context Csikszentmihalyi (1995) speaks of the need for “autonomy and independence “. Since this expression is often used in everyday language synonymously with “egoism” and thus confused, it seems useful to us to use the term “self-realization”, the original term used by Maslow, whose the concept is referred to by Csikszentmihalyi. Maslow (1970) states that the need for self-realization arises, when the needs of previous states have been satisfied (see fig. 1).

Even if all these needs are satisfied, we may still often (if not always) expect that a new discontent and restlessness will soon develop, unless the individual is doing what *he*, individually, is fitted for. A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be ultimately at peace with himself. What a man *can* be he *must* be true to his own nature. This need we call self-actualization. (Maslow 1970, p. 46)

Become whatever you are able to be. What an individual can become must be in keeping with his specific history, aptitudes and talents. He realizes himself accordingly and can thus find peace with himself and experience himself in his entirety. According to Maslow (1959, p. 126 ff.) human beings are fully developed when they are able to realize themselves in keeping with their maturity, psychological health and state of development. Compared to others they have:

- a clearer, more efficient perception of reality;
- more openness - also for new experiences;
- a higher degree of personal unity and wholeness;
- a greater degree of spontaneity, expressivity, liveliness, etc.;
- a true “self”, a strong identity, autonomy etc.
- greater objectivity, independence and greater ability for self -expansion/ self-transcendence;
- creativity;
- the ability to combine the concrete and the abstract;
- a democratic character structure;
- the ability to love etc.

Going along with Maslow we maintain: In order to achieve a completely developed personality, or – using the language of the martial arts – to bring the character to perfection, it is necessary to reach the level at which self-realization with all one's strength, talents and power is possible. The prerequisite for this is the fulfillment of lower level needs (psychological needs, security, love / affiliation, esteem and so on, see figure 1).



*Fig. 1: Maslow's pyramid of needs (description by Zimbardo 1983, p. 415)*

Knapp, who devoted himself to child development from a psychoanalytic-anthropologic point of view, uses relatively similar terms to describe the conditions of development in the primary relationships: support, care-taking, trust, acceptance. They all characterize the primary relationship and are also prerequisites for an existence in the positive, affirmative mode (comp. 1988, p. 127 ff.) It would be too much to expect martial arts to be seen as a remedy for all the deficiencies experienced in childhood. But if an appropriate basis exists (such as fulfillment of psychological needs as well as the needs for security, love, esteem) martial arts can make a valuable contribution to the realization of the self.

When the martial arts are taught and lived in a harmonious way, according to “*Do*”, they represent a path on which self-development can be stimulated. One might describe this path, when it is consciously completed, as being “self-forming”, as seen in Müller (2002, p. 95). He writes:

Self-forming means..., actively seeking situations that provide a learning potential, using this potential consciously, and actively turning situations that require action

into learning situations. Self-forming also entails using that which merely happens, the entire spectrum from that which is desirable to that which is undesirable, all the way to massively harmful, fateful experiences as learning opportunities.<sup>4</sup>

In the case of children and youths, this form of learning is usually not consciously sought. They are often attracted by factors such as the power displayed in martial arts, fighting techniques, acrobatics and the feeling of being “unbeatable”. The process of self-forming is unconscious. However, we can observe the same effects in adults, who have consciously sought out martial arts as a path of further development or “self-forming”.

Often the first step is characterized by insecurities, which have to be mastered. These might be: “Will I be able to deal with these new forms of practice and the sequence of movements? Will I make a fool of myself, because I don’t know how to do it? Will I have enough stamina and endurance, etc.?” Despite uncertainties, people find that the physical exercises, the group affiliation, and the successful mastering of initial difficulties produce a feeling of satisfaction heretofore unknown. In addition, the practice includes traditional knowledge about holistic, Far Eastern medicine, activating the body’s inherent energy centers, etc., thereby strengthening well-being more than Western sports (comp. Ko Myong 1999, p. 162 ff and 295 ff; Linden 2003, p. 18 ff).

Over time the feeling of security increases. The exercises are mastered, and more and more, new exercises become a challenge. At this point most people have the desire to learn more and also more complex sequences. The ability to concentrate increases and reactions improve. Psychological blockage decreases. The participants learn successively *to trust themselves* and *to be more daring*. Each new step toward another belt requires extensive skills and increased personal stability. Put another way: To reach the next level it is always necessary to exceed one’s own limit and to master new requirements. So, step by step, the participant acquires more self-assurance and courage. If a person has courage, he has more options for finding solutions to conflicts. Self-confidence creates the basis for calmness. The use of force recedes more and more into the background.

A further step on the *Do* is characterized by the need for self-expression when doing the practices, for finding one’s own “style” and improving it. From a

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4 “Selbstbildung bedeutet..., gezielt Situationen aufsuchen, die Lernpotentiale enthalten, diese Potentiale bewusst zu nutzen, sowie Handlungssituationen gezielt als Lernsituationen zu gestalten. Selbstbildung beinhaltet darüber hinaus auch, das sich ohne Zutun Ereignende, und zwar in ganzer Breite vom Wünschenswerten über das Widrige bis hin zum massiv beeinträchtigenden, schicksalhaften Ereignis, als Anlass zum Lernen zu interpretieren.”

certain level on, we recognize that the participants broaden their horizons by getting interested in other kinds of martial arts. At this point differences in “style” begin to be understood. Individual strengths are recognized and also what one person can learn from the other.

Along the path of individual development, moral concepts might be revised. Law and order thinking, “the search for a guilty party” who receives “fair punishment” can be overcome during the stage of self-realization and increased self-confidence. It is possible to develop more universal principles than “an eye for an eye” or “the appropriate punishment for the guilty”. Whoever reaches this stage will be able to orient himself to the principle of the preservation of life or also to the situations and conditions of others. Instead of looking for a guilty party, he will concentrate on how he himself can work in a way that supports life, that meets the requirements of and is constructive in each situation and in a larger general context. Principles such as the use of force, punishment, self-assertion, the need to get one’s way, etc. recede more and more into the background. Principles such as tolerance, acceptance of differences, unconditional benevolence etc. can come into the foreground.

The goal of personality development, as is seen in martial arts (*Budo*) could be described in terms used by Csikzentmihalyi (comp. 1995, p.224 ff.) as being a self that has achieved self-confidence, self-determination, self-realization, self-transcendence (extending individual boundaries) and finally the wisdom or spirituality. Wisdom and spirituality are, along with the other qualities, at the apex of personal – or in the terms of Budo “character” – development. From a spiritual point of view, thinking, desiring and feeling are no longer experienced as being contradictory, and they can start to melt into harmonious cooperation (comp. Csikzentmihalyi 1995, p. 309). According to Csikzentmihalyi wisdom is based upon the pillars of knowing, virtue and a personal dimension of calm and joy. It is capable of drawing from the depths of experience. One can no longer be distracted and led astray by life’s superficialities, but rather he can quietly direct his attention toward lasting and deep truths (comp. Csikzentmihalyi 1995, p. 310). In the context of emotional and social skills this could mean:

If the greatest proof of social skill lies in the ability to soothe other people’s painful emotions, then dealing with an enraged person is perhaps the highest degree of mastery. According to what we know about self-regulation of anger and emotional contagiousness, we tend to believe that an effective strategy would be to distract the angry person, to place oneself in his position and then to direct his attention to something else so that he can tune into to more positive feelings – a kind of emotional Judo (comp. Goleman, 1997, p. 161f).

Goleman demonstrates this using the following example (comp. p. 162 ff.):

Terry was one of the first people to study Aikido in Japan. Since he trained 8 hours a day, he was in perfect condition. While on the train back home from

Tokyo one evening, a drunk boarded the train and started annoying the other travelers. Terry was about to intervene so that no one would be seriously injured. At one point the drunk was about to jump on Terry, because he took Terry to be a foreigner who had to be taught “Japanese manners”. At this exact moment a small man in his seventies began to converse in such a joyful and friendly manner that the drunk was unable to ignore him. The elderly man asked what he had drunk, found a common topic of conversation and finally invited the drunk over to his house. At first angry, then hesitant and finally trusting, the drunken man began to take part in the conversation. He even began talking about the crisis in his life. As he was getting out, Terry saw that the drunk had stretched out on the seat with his head in the old man’s lap. “That is emotional brilliance” (p. 163), the expression of a wise and spiritual bearing that would highly enrich everyone’s life.

#### **4. If You Do not Dare to Try, You Do not Love, but Destroy - Sources of Violence and Misunderstanding**

We are also familiar with the opposite: When we are dissatisfied and stressed out, when we are not on an even keel, and when we are proverbially *in a bad mood*, we are inclined to react by being irritated. Usually, we then are unable to give in, we dare less and are not successful in behaving skillfully and intelligently. Whenever I am not at one with myself, I do not succeed in interacting adequately with my environment. In social situations we then often observe in retrospect that through our reactivity and words we have destroyed something that cannot easily be righted.

In conjunction with violence we have noticed again and again that three general factors favor aggressiveness and violence: The first is a sense of something lacking or a dissatisfaction, which means existing in a deficiency mode. The second factor is frustration, and the third is “model learning”. The biological element also plays an important role, which is described by Adler, Freud and Lorenz as the “aggression drive” (see for example Eibl-Eibesfeldt 1993, Lorenz 1965). It is the “legacy” of evolution that human beings can learn behavioral patterns through behaving consciously, through training, or through addictive patterns. Therefore now we would like to look more closely at the factors, “existing in a deficiency mode”, “frustration” and “model learning.

He who is lacking, is incomplete, is frustrated, and tends more often - if he does not become depressed - to need to assert himself against others and to react aggressively. According to Dollard et al (1970) human aggression is always a consequence of frustration. They also maintain that frustration always leads to some form of aggression. In a word: He who lives based upon a deficiency mode (“half empty glass”) is more likely to act aggressively. This most likely also applies when the needs in Maslow’s pyramid remain unfulfilled. That is to say, among other things, that the propensity toward aggressive behavior

increases when material and physiological needs, for safety, love, belonging, acceptance and ultimately for self-realization, are not adequately met. Then people have:

- Less efficient perception of reality;
- Less openness
- Less fully developed, personal unity
- Less spontaneity, vitality and expressiveness
- Less authentic self
- Less objectivity, autonomy and self-transcendence
- Less creativity
- Fewer possibilities for combining the abstract and the concrete
- Less democratic character-structure
- Less ability to love etc.

The third factor, which, according to our observations, encourages violence is model learning. Negative, uninhibited “models” are often copied (comp. Nolting 1998, p. 106 ff). We see this daily when pedestrians push and shove. When the traffic light takes a long time to turn green, and someone starts crossing on the red light, it does not take a long time, until others follow. The higher a person’s social position, and the more visible he is (e.g. pilot in uniform), the more likely it is that his behavior will be imitated.

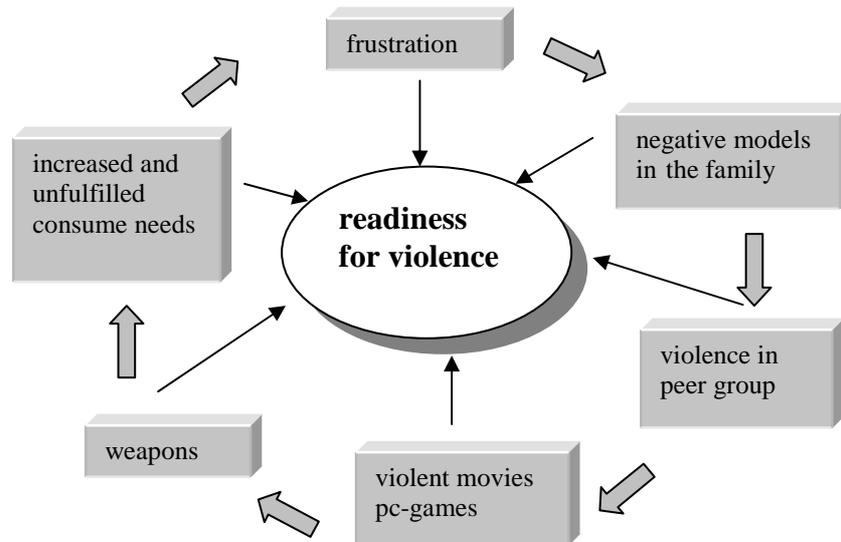
The concept of model learning is based upon the observation that, to a great extent, learning is based on other people, who for certain reasons, under certain circumstances, in certain situations act as role models and are therefore imitated. Parents are very influential role models.

Unfortunately parents are generally not aware of the fact *that punishment in the form of beating or yelling at the child serves as a model for aggression*. The behavior modeled and taught by parents often continues on into the next generation. In any case people who were mistreated in childhood run a greater risk of using violence on their own children (comp. Nolting 1998, p. 101).

Nolting refers here to the ‘contagious’ effect on groups. In addition to their parents, children also look to their contemporaries. In certain groups (such as hooligans, street gangs, etc.) aggression is rewarded with admiration. Particularly boys, who tend to be antisocial, are easily influenced and often try to join such groups (comp. Nolting 1998, p. 102). Furthermore the influence of TV and Video on the development of aggressive behavior is subject to heated discussion. Nolting comes to the conclusion that

subtle spitefulness in the family [is surely more influential than] entire hoards of cowboys. (1998, p. 106)

In our experience everything comes together in children and youths who are especially susceptible to violence: frustration due to material and psycho-social disadvantages (which is to say Maslow's scale of needs are not fulfilled), negative role models in the family and the same age group (peer group), the influence of T.V., Video, PC games, fascination with weapons, etc. (see. fig. 2).



*Fig. 2: Sources of susceptibility to violence*

The central question at this point is: How can martial arts help a person escape this readiness for violence?

## 5. The path is the goal

In summary, one can identify a process that leads to greater susceptibility to violence. This process is a series of complex behavior patterns, based upon family and psychosocial factors, continuously reinforced by successes and negative “flow experiences” (see Csikszentmihalyi) such as PC games, the use of weapons, etc.

Neuroscientists use images for the neurological processes that lead to reinforcement of this kind of behavior: the neuronal links that reinforce aggressive behavior develop like the tracks that are formed when a person repeatedly takes the same path through a corn field. The continuous path

through the corn field forms tracks that a person selects again and again. If the corn field is seen from above, over time these paths will become clearly visible. This is similar to conflict situations, when the same aggressive patterns of behavior are used and – as described above – reinforced. The nerve endings needed can begin to construct an increasingly dense network and structures similar to the well-worn paths in the corn field. Non-aggressive behavior is no longer even considered in many situations. Violence and aggression become the reactions of choice.

One can imagine that strong incentives are needed to acquire new, non-aggressive behavior patterns, and these cannot be based only upon instructions and the transmission of cognitive knowledge. One has to be offered something as complex as the well-worn paths of aggressive behavior. Using the same metaphor: the corn field needs attractive, new tracks of non-violence. Areas and fields of activity in which the activity itself offers interesting incentives and is highly stimulating are particularly good for children and youths. That is to say, for the prevention of violence in children and youths, activities are recommended that contain experiences through which behavior changes can occur, due to the inherent structure of the activities. Children and youths, and also adults, learn most effectively through experience and discovery.

Thus, in our opinion it is less important to educate children and youths by means of imparting knowledge and punishment; rather we should offer them experiences through which they can re-learn, can enlarge their behavior repertoire and further develop their personalities. This approach is advocated in experiential learning, first developed by Kurt Hahn. Paramount to this approach is the “holistic experience, i.e. it addresses cognitive, emotional and above all operational levels of learning (comp. Reiners 2003, p. 14). The activities, situations and elements that are used – according to Reiners –

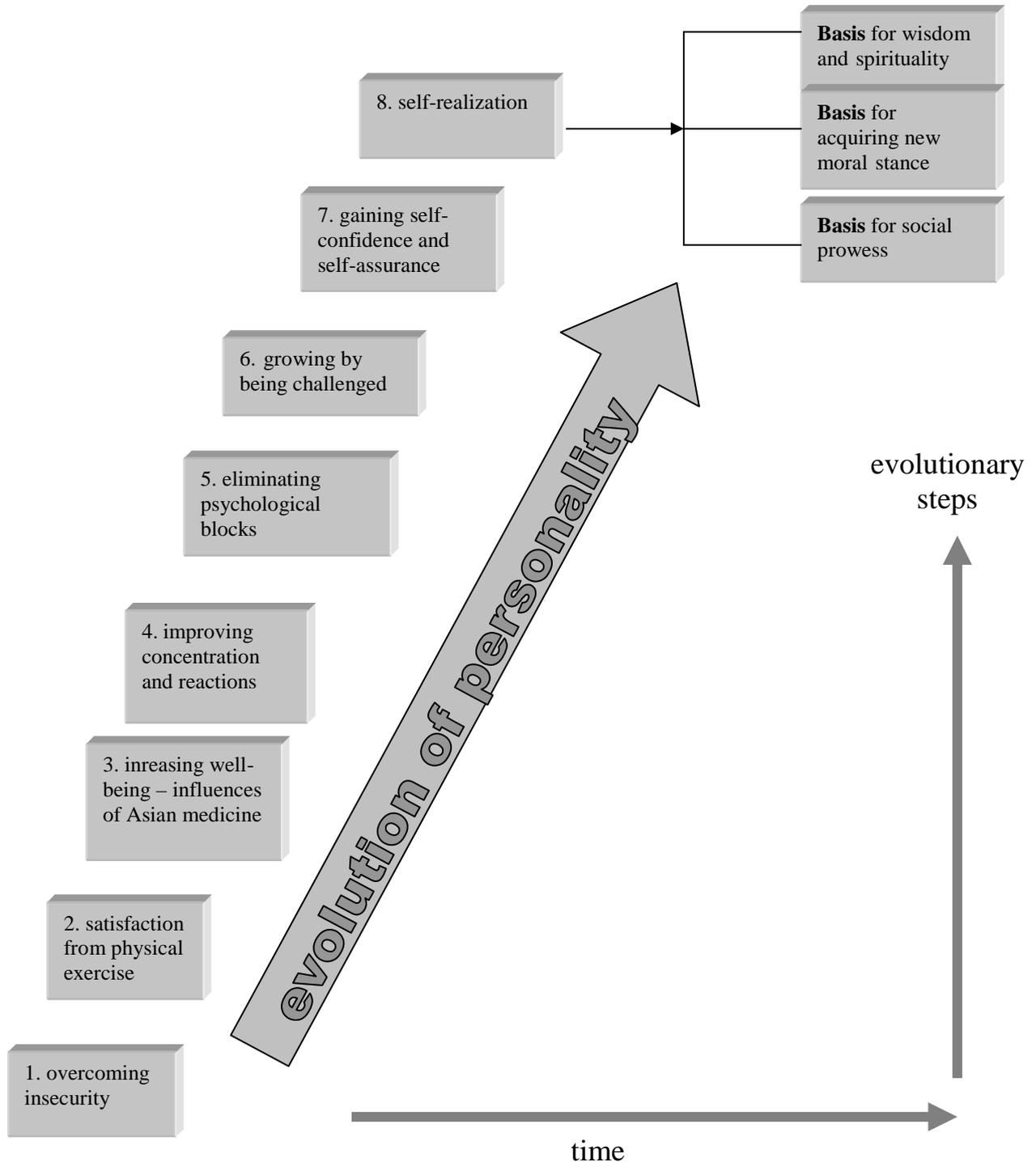
should be highly challenging, increase curiosity and stimulate discussion or action, as well as be of a serious nature; this means the results should be verifiable.

Martial arts contain the cognitive, emotional and above all the operational levels of learning described by Reiners – and more than that. We shall now summarize the aspects presented in part 3 and then look more closely at various methods that can be actively used in the areas of preventing violence and conflict management.

## **5.1. The Contribution of Martial Arts to Personality Development**

As was already implied in section 3, children and youths most likely become interested in martial arts due to the nimbus of Budo, often thought to be a way of “becoming invincible”, being “superhuman” and of “being able to master any

dangerous situation”. In our experience, when the Budo path is taken and kept up, the following development can be observed. We have shown it here in the following chart as a series of steps.



*Fig. 3: The evolution of personality and Budo*

At the beginning, experiences with the Budo are primarily physical (well-being, acquiring physical skills). Later the participant also begins to feel the psychosocial effects of the Budo (elimination of blockage, increased self-confidence, safety, self-realization, modesty as an inner necessity...)

At this point it could be conjectured that Budo training is the best path for the prevention of violence and management of conflicts. This might be true, if the participant is capable of devoting himself to the Budo path of holistic change and also fulfils its requirements.

For the purposes of this study, certain martial arts practices can be appropriated and employed in conflict management and the prevention of violence. We shall demonstrate this using the example of sword work and the use of martial arts principles in communication during situations of conflict.

## **5.2. Sword Work as a Way to Resolve Conflicts**

Is it possible to use a weapon to practice solving conflicts? At first glance, this is a paradox. However, it becomes easier to understand when one notes that work with the wooden sword, the *bokken*, magnifies old behavior patterns, thus making them more conscious and accessible to change. In the language of NLP, neuro-linguistic programming: the conflict experience is given a new framework, becomes “reframed”. This is based on the knowledge that the meaning an event, a statement, a behavior, a belief, or a stimulus has for us depends upon the context, or framework, into which it is placed. The frame is the framework. Reframing means constructing a new framework to impart new meaning. A picture can look quite different and have a different effect when put into a new frame. When a problem is reframed, the same event takes on a new meaning; new reactions and new behaviors are then possible. Reframing thus is a process of re-interpreting of a new perspective, a new kind of perception, a new interpretation. Reframing is a creative process, as it requires of a person the ability to forsake old tracks and try out new possibilities (see Bandler & Grinder 200, s. 14 ff, and also the article by Schettgen in this book).

In psychoanalytical terms, one would probably speak of the fact that work is done on counter-transference. We want this concept, that actually applies to the therapeutic setting, to be understood here to mean that all the (emotional) reactions of the person sitting opposite me are seen as the result of my previous “transferences”, i.e. attributions. Both transference and counter-transference occur unconsciously and non-verbally.

Here is a practical example. A conflict, an “attack”, even when it is merely verbal, usually arouses in a person a protective reflex that can be expressed by one of three actions: Fight, flight or freeze (see Wohak’s article in this book). All three of these options, developed in the course of evolution, are

understandable and reasonable in a conflict. However, they are not helpful in the sense that a win-win situation results. Either you win, or I win, or we break off contact or I freeze, giving up any option for freedom of action.

In our training sessions we try to dissolve these (old) behavior patterns as follows:

1. At first the participants are encouraged to get familiar with the wooden sword: How would they tend to hold it? Which position seems natural to them? Usually the participants choose a position with the exercise sword (that they are unfamiliar with) that gives them security and that also does not restrict them too much.
2. Subsequently the participants are asked to visualize a (fictive) attack and to react spontaneously with the sword. Here the three previously mentioned alternatives present themselves in a most amazing way: fight, flight or freeze. Especially when the different models are presented to them, the participants become conscious of and understand these mechanisms.
3. Now the participants (in groups) are asked to find different, creative patterns with which to face the attack. To do this it is necessary to re-interpret the situation. In other words: The participants have to reframe, or to become aware of and dissolve, their own counter-transferences. As long as I stubbornly keep interpreting the other person's contact as an attack, I limit my behavior modes and can only react in the fixed, old ways.
4. In a last step, the creative and often also amusing results are presented and the physical exercise is translated into the area of verbal communication: What meaning do experiences with the sword have for my behavior in conflicts and for my communication in general?

We shall now leave the sword example and see whether it is possible to transfer martial arts principles to the more general area of communication processes used in resolving conflicts.

### **5.3. Principles of Martial Arts and Resolving Conflicts**

The principles discussed below are generally valid for Teakwondo. Their significance to combat will be discussed and a possible re-interpretation for communication processes will be detailed. These principles are interpreted according to their meaning for communication in conflict situations and are taught to the participants in our seminars through practical exercises. We work with the following principles:

### **Permit yourself to be struck in order to win**

*Significance for combat:* Allow the opponent to only barely hit you, or to hit where the blow is insignificant, and counter as hard as you can. One blow decides who wins.

*Significance for communication:* When communication is very aggressive, it is possible to take the wind out of the opponent's sails by receiving some verbal blows and thus directing the discussion to more positive venues. Recognize the moment for you to self-confidently, appropriately and effectively state your position.

### **Follow the change that you cause**

*Significance for combat:* A waiting opponent changes his position, when you show him a series of changes. Following these changes permits you to strike.

*Significance for communication:* If a situation is muddled and if your opponent gets fixed in one position, loosen up the battlefield. Resolution of problems will then be possible.

### **Do not adapt to the speed of your opponent**

*Significance for combat:* If the other person is a fast fighter, then stand and wait. If the other person waits, then attack. If the rival forces his tempo on you, then he will win.

*Significance for communication:* Counter an aggressive verbal exchange with restraint, thus causing the opponent to become uncertain about his aggressiveness. Mutual reproaches are not constructive. On the other hand active listening, becoming active oneself, and using the right opportunity to challenge the other and offer one's own point of view are helpful.

### **Do not permit your mind to get stuck**

*Significance for combat:* During combat do not insist on one technique, but remain flexible. If you strike, do not become elated by your success, but keep an eye on your partner's reaction, his rage, and pain, and strike again immediately.

*Significance for communication:* Be flexible in a discussion, do not insist stubbornly on your own point of view, allow the discussion to go in different directions, and perhaps return to the point of departure at a later time.

**Seize, when you are seized**

*Significance for combat:* A person who seizes you wants power. The moment you grab him, you take control.

*Significance for communication:* Do not try to avoid an existing conflict, but pick an appropriate time to present your ideas and try to resolve the conflict accordingly.

**When you are being dragged, let it happen**

*Significance for combat:* Usually the stronger one drags. Resisting him uses up energy, and the opponent can then use another technique. Take him unaware by suddenly going forward; turn his power into your own.

*Significance for communication:* If someone wants to pull you to a certain direction, go along, but determine the direction yourself.

**Give way, when you are pushed**

*Significance for combat:* It is impossible to run into an open door. If the apparently weaker one suddenly gives way, the stronger one loses his dominance, he runs into thin air, and the attack evaporates.

*Significance for communication:* If someone attacks you massively verbally, then open the doors and do not let yourself be hurt, meaning do not form and solidify your boundaries. Let the other have his fling, let him run out of steam, and then at the right moment make your point. For example: “You are right... this is one side of the coin; the other side is....” Never say “yes, but...” The “but” offers unnecessary resistance and devaluates the opponent’s position. Replace the “but” either by an “and” or else respond to the attack by saying: “yes, that is your position, and using this perspective I totally agree with you. *And at the same time* it is also possible to say....” (explain your position).

**Maintain a distance that corresponds to your opponent’s height**

*Significance for combat:* Remain close to a tall opponent and keep a smaller one at a distance.

*Significance for communication:* Be flexible in combat, and adapt yourself to your opponent. Keep an eye on the position of your sparing partner (boss, colleague, your employee) etc., respect him and react appropriately.

### **Startle your rival**

*Significance for combat:* Impress your rival with loud energetic yell, and surprise him by a sudden attack.

*Significance for communication:* Throw your opponent off guard by taking paradoxical action.

### **Do not let get lost in looking at details**

*Significance for combat:* Do not concentrate only on feet, hands or eyes; but take in the entire opponent.

*Significance for communication:* Do not look at a single argument, or a sentence, but watch which direction a conversation takes, and keep in mind its context and its goal. Keep an overview of the situation.

### **Become your opponent**

*Significance for combat:* put yourself into the position of thinking from the point of view of your opponent. If you merely think that he is better, or has a superior technique, you will lose. Do not be influenced, but do be respectful.

*Significance for communication:* Have respect for your opponent, yet do not be intimidated by his position, power or whatever else. Put yourself in his place, have a clear idea about what your opponent is trying to do, thus directing the conversation yourself.

The interesting thing about these principles is that the position of strength is never given up, even when you concede or step back. It is always a question of keeping control over the situation and your own reactions. Satisfactory changes can be achieved only when one maintains a sense of strength. Feeling weak, frustrated, and deficient leads – as has been previously discussed – to dissatisfaction and to patterns of behavior that are usually unconsciously motivated by a need to prove one's own strength and power.

## **5.4. Preventing Violence and Experiencing the Role of a Victim**

Within the framework of prevention of violence, we not only work with elements of martial arts, but also with role-playing, experiential activities and rules. An important step is to put oneself in the victim's shoes. When youths are discovering what they do not want, it is possible to work with them on understanding what might be unpleasant for others. Therefore, it is not sufficient

just to speak about or give out information about the victim's situation. It is only possible really to know what it is like to be a victim by feeling that way oneself. Only when I experience how hopeless the situation of a victim is, what kind of fears can come up in such a situation, and when I experience how unpleasant these fears are, am I able to realize how and what the victim feels. In order to demonstrate this we use various role-playing situations, which demonstrate very clearly how vulnerable the body is and what it is like to be a victim. We assume that supporting empathy will diminish the readiness to use violence – based on the motto “Do not unto others, that which you would not wish for yourself.”

### **5.5. Rules and Experiential Learning**

A further step is mutually learning new rules. Again this is not done by means of information and transferring abstract knowledge but through the immediate experience of appropriate role-playing or other activities. The new rules differ from old family or peer group norms and are meant to widen one's horizon.

The first rules learned have to do with rules for conversation and communication that are introduced at the beginning of our trainings and seminars for children and youths (only one person at a time speaks, no one is to be laughed at, everyone makes an effort to listen to others, etc.). We write down these rules and refer to them regularly.

Moreover, rules are developed in games in which, at the beginning, anything goes– for instance also rudeness. But everyone is asked to interrupt immediately when he is, for example, touched too roughly or when someone else treats him in a way he does not want to be treated (hair-pulling, tickling, danger of damage to clothes, etc.). During each interruption a rule is formulated and written down. This catalog of rules is then valid as the codex to which the entire group has to abide in the future.

Other experiential actions and elements of martial arts are also combined with rules that are partially verbalized or grasped and understood solely from the situation– without having to be expressed explicitly (e.g. a rubber boat can only move when everybody works together, pays attention to each other and paddles evenly. Each time someone stubbornly attempts to go it alone, the logical consequences follow immediately: the boat might begin going in circles, and the group is unable to achieve its goal).

For the rules to be meaningful and binding over a period of time, we believe it is necessary, with the aid of experiential measures, to strengthen our participants' self-trust, self-confidence and sense of responsibility. Only then can a solid personal foundation be created, in which new rules can be permanently anchored.

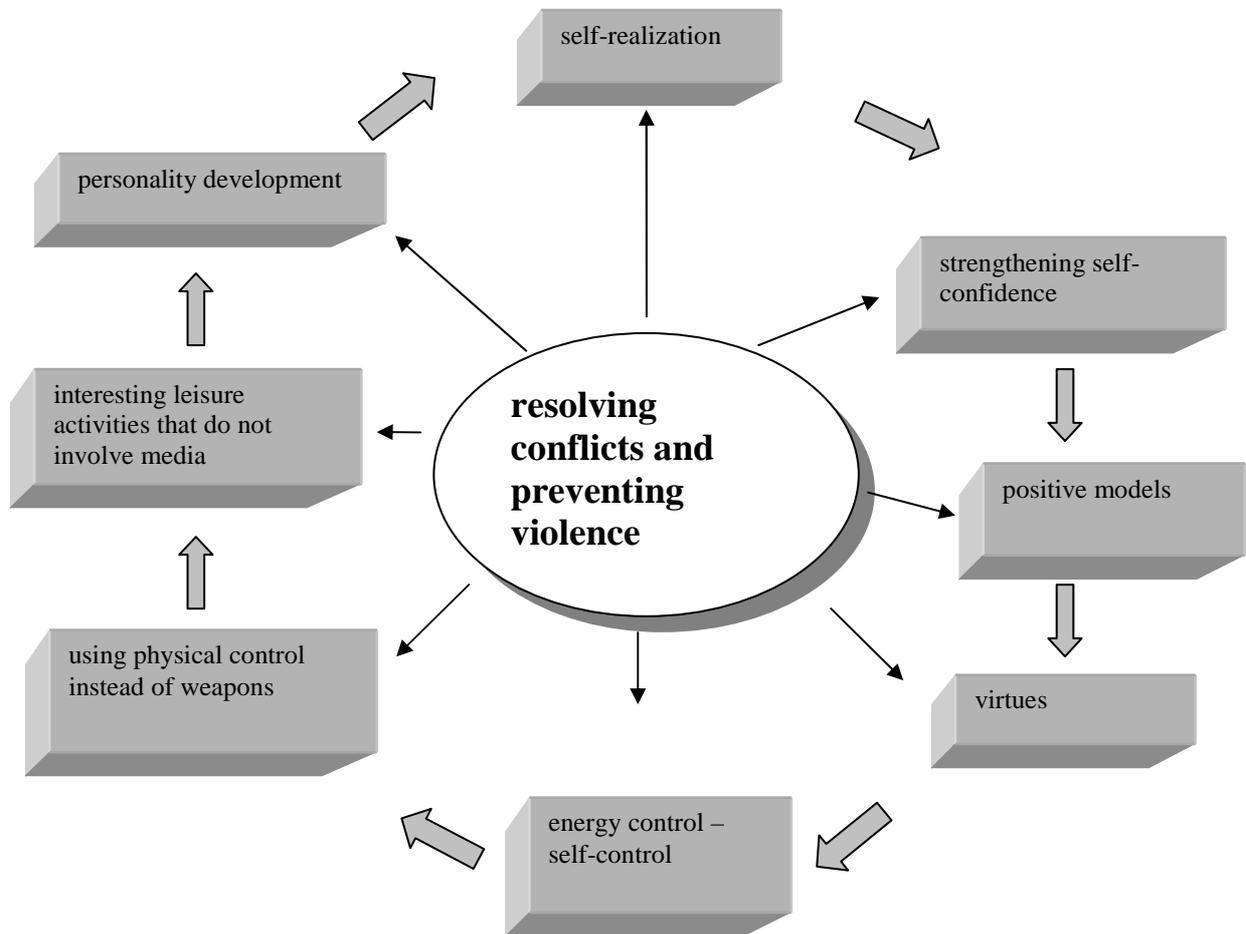
## 6. Martial Arts – Managing Conflicts – Prevention of Violence

A person who is developing his ability to fight – his fighting spirit and courage - who knows his aggressions and his aggressiveness, who is able to admit and handle them, is able to freely decide for or against combat:

A person who can fight, is also capable of refraining from combat and does not have to prove himself either to himself or to others. (Wolters 2001, p. 1)

A person who is able to feel strong in combat, even when he gives in, who does not feel inferior and who sees alternative options even in a complicated situation will be able to refrain from asserting himself and will instead seek solutions. A person who can empathize with the victim's situation will be less likely to be violent.

Now we can answer the question we posed at the beginning on the subject of “martial arts and prevention of violence – a paradox?” We do not teach polished combat techniques; we teach the central elements of “*Do*”. “The path is the goal!” In our training courses and seminars on prevention of violence and conflict management, we go step by step: group dynamics, role-playing, reflection, mutual development of rules, experiential activities such as rafting, climbing, etc. The long-term goal is to motivate children and youths to practice Aikido, Taekwondo and other martial arts regularly over a long period of time. This is done in order to strengthen them to the point that they can use a positive “spiral” as a substitute for the negative “spiral” of increased readiness to use violence.



*Fig. 4: Positive spiral – prevention of violence by martial arts*

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# **Aikido and Systemic Sculpture Work in Groups and Organizations**

**(David Sikora)**

1. A “Therapeutic” Battle...
2. The Essence of Conflict: Ambivalence and Multi-valence
3. Aikido
4. Systemic Sculpture Work with Groups and Families
  - 4.1. Real People Involved
  - 4.2. A Beginner’s Guide to Practical Taoism...or How Aikido Enhances Sculpture Work
  - 4.3. Centering
5. Summary

# **Aikido and Systemic Sculpture Work in Groups and Organizations**

## **(David Sikora)**

This article outlines a synthesis of the principles and basic movement patterns of Aikido, a modern Japanese martial art, and systemic sculpture work as applied in family therapy. Both are systems for dealing with conflict, seemingly in very divergent fields.

I have been developing the following concepts and practical applications over many years in my work as an therapist in individual and group settings, a supervisor with health care professionals, and of course, as a student and teacher of Aikido. My journey to this point was anything other than a standard career as a clinical psychologist. I hope that, through the case studies and anecdotes provided, the reader finds his/her way to both an intellectual understanding of and an emotional connection to a written description of what I normally present in experiential trainings and workshops lasting from two to five days.

### **1. A “Therapeutic” Battle...**

I started working with people in a therapeutic context over 25 years ago while I was attending a program for my master’s degree in counselling psychology. At that time I was doing 24 hour shifts in a halfway-house in southern California, a few miles from the Mexican border. It was actually an outstation for the psychiatric hospital in downtown San Diego, the residents a colourful mix of older street alcoholics, younger people from middle class backgrounds who had been pushed over the edge from psychedelic-drug overdoses, and garden variety paranoid schizophrenics. Some where coherent, some not, all were heavily medicated.

One guy was a burned-out Hell’s Angels type named Ron with a permanent mean and bleary-eyed glare. He would stomp around the complex, a shabby former motel in the classic “U”-form, kicking up dust with his worn out boots. He seemed to light up only when he got a chance to provoke one of his weaker fellow residents, and his favourite victim was a squat Chicano man named Alphonse, whose paranoid hallucinations were complicated by epileptic attacks. One of my first weekend shifts, in which I was alone with about 50 residents (California in those days was considered a model in forward-thinking

psychiatric health care!) I came into the day room to find the two of them going at it. Alphonse was literally foaming at the mouth, his tormentor laughing and swatting him on the back of his head, dancing lightly away when his prey would launch a flailing, stumbling attack. In my innocence I stepped between them, yelled at the bully Ron to go outside and tried to hold and soothe Alphonse, which earned me a bite on the finger and a shredded T-shirt. As I let go of him he ran out of the room into the courtyard, where his more agile opponent slugged him again, eliciting a scream of anger and pain. I was getting desperate to get this situation under control; my adrenaline level was up in the stratosphere. I knew one or both of them would have to be hospitalized, and I had already sent one of the more lucid residents to call the clinic.

My only plan was to try to keep the two of them apart until help arrived, at the same time I wasn't eager to get bitten or god knew what else. In the meantime Alphonse, becoming increasingly apoplectic, had pulled off his belt and was trying to whip Ron with the heavy buckle. I grabbed the nearest thing that seemed at all applicable in the situation, a long-handled mop, still somewhat damp, reeking of mildew and disinfectant. I poked and jabbed at Alphonse, who had shifted into the slow burn of a bull just before the charge, so he would go after me instead of Ron (who backed off to watch the fun). The scheme worked in a way, except that Alphonse got so frustrated that he used his belt buckle to slam a few holes in the hood of my car. In our circling dance we had arrived in the parking lot. Fortunately it was a beat-up old Ford, so the damage was hardly noticeable. When the police arrived we were both standing there panting, me with a bleeding finger and ripped shirt, holding the mop in front of me like a cattle prod, Alphonse with his belt dangling at his side, eyes bulging. The cops climb out of their patrol car, assess the situation, and one asks: "So, who is the patient?"

I don't remember exactly what happened next, except I do remember laughing. More than any other reason I suspect that is why I didn't end up spending the night in the locked psychiatric ward ...

After that "kick-off" for my career as psychologist and psychotherapist, I was prepared for almost anything. Since then I've never had such a dramatic encounter in my therapy practice or my work as a trainer and supervisor in various clinical and organisational settings. But still an element of intense conflict and encounter recurs, certainly not constantly, but again and again as clients and group members feel their needs are not being met or we are not properly understanding their situation (as was obviously the case with Alphonse).

## 2. The Essence of Conflict: Ambivalence and Multivalence

On an energetic level we understand conflict as a situation where two forces are colliding or trying to move apart in diametrically opposed directions. In the human arena, however, conflict starts on the intrapersonal level. When you say “white” and I respond with “black”, then I have made a choice, and that occurred within me. I felt something in response to your “white” and chose, maybe not so consciously, to move against it. I could have said “ok!” This means simply that all conflict begins with inner conflict, so called ambivalence, which suggests the physical model described above happening inside our bodies. Naturally humans are complex beings, so often we have inside our heads (Shakespeare would say in our breast) many competing voices and urges all demanding attention. The essential challenge for the individual in a perceived conflict situation, is to become aware of his/her own inner conflict(s), resolve these first and then from a literally new, clarified position or “standpoint” to deal with whatever the external situation is presenting. In theory simple, but of course, putting that into practice isn’t. In my work with groups and individuals, I have seen over and over again that once people do the admittedly difficult work and come to inner resolution, the outer work is at least half done. The outer problems, if not directly solved, can be dealt with much more easily. We solve problem with increased grace and ease when we are relaxed, and relaxation can be described as a state of resolved inner tension.

I believe all therapists/helpers start out with ambivalent feelings about what they are doing. They want to help and feel positive about this intention, and at the same time they are somewhat afraid and uncertain, with good reason. There are a lot of unknown variables when working with individuals seeking help, and these factors can increase geometrically when dealing with a group or team. Unfortunately what often happens is that the helper, in trying to protect himself and deal with conflicting feelings, walls himself off behind a veneer of “professionalism” that too often separates him from the people he wants to help.

I was searching for a way to resolve my own inner conflict between wanting to help others, but at the same time being afraid of them, as well as being afraid of doing something wrong. In an attempt to center and to calm myself, I turned to practicing meditation and visualisation before my work with individual clients and groups. So I had a mask of peacefulness on, and inside I was nervous and trying to hide it. As if the people sitting across from me didn’t notice! This kind of protective wall can be in itself more hindering than helpful. I felt intuitively that something was missing, though I couldn’t then say what that something was.

### 3. Aikido

In the early 80s I attended a weekend course about family communication in the countryside north of LA. It was a mixed group of professionals and lay people, and a mixed curriculum of mainstream family therapy, communication exercises and a dose of new age spirituality. Somewhere in the middle of the workshop, the trainer cleared an area and introduced a friend of his who came out wearing a white judo jacket and a black long skirt. I remember thinking, “what is this (or he) supposed to be?”

This new guest was an Aikido teacher, wearing a judo suit with a black skirt-like covering over his suit pants. What he demonstrated with a few of his students was totally fascinating and new for me. The teacher would let himself get attacked in various ways by his students, sometimes they would throw punches or kicks, try to grab him or even hit or stab him with a broom handle. Each time he would, seemingly without strain or apparent effort, disarm his attacker and bring him under control. A major difference from other martial arts that I had experienced or seen in films was that there was no hitting, kicking or other kinds of intimidation, humiliation or defeat imposed on the “aggressor”. As the demonstration went on, it looked more and more like a fun dance, the spectators and the participants were smiling and laughing. The Aikido teacher explained that his goal was to blend with his “apparent” attacker, become one with him and find a way at the physical level to transform the “apparent” conflict situation to one of togetherness and harmony. He kept using the word “apparent”, because, he said, an attack is merely a matter of perspective. We can also perceive a thrown punch as a gift of energy, provided we are relaxed and awake enough to “receive” the gift in an appropriate manner. We were encouraged to try out a few simple movement patterns, and also to experiment verbally with responses to apparent verbal attacks, responses that include the attacker and offer possibility of unity.

This experience motivated me to try out Aikido in my home area. I began training regularly in the mid 80s. At some point along the way, I noticed something was changing for me in my work as a therapist and group leader. It is not easy to put in words exactly what that difference is, but if I had to pick a single word to describe the change, then it would be “safety”. I was feeling more relaxed, at the same time more engaged with the people coming to me. I felt more involved in them as people, more interested. I became more willing to challenge them in their assumptions, and it seemed I could feel when they were “asking for it”, wanting to be called for some inconsistencies or just plain nonsense. The work became more fun for me and I am sure for my clients and groups as well. I felt more alive and in flow with them.

I believe this comes from learning to deal with confrontation on a regular, physical basis on the mat, and that this practice translates in time to the psyche.

Sheldon Kopp, at the very beginning of his bestseller, “If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him”, uses the metaphor of being (sometimes) in a kind of Judo match with his clients when they come in for therapy. He writes about having to be awake, agile and in skilled in psychic self-defence in order to avoid getting caught in their mind games.

Kopp’s comparison of psychotherapy to Judo has some similarities with the Aikido-therapy synthesis, but what he describes has a somewhat cold and defensive ring to it. If successful, he has managed not to get “caught”. As with my attempts to protect and calm myself with meditation, the therapist may feel better, but there is no enhanced connection to the client.

In Aikido, we are actively seeking to join or entrain with our partner. It is a warm, connecting encounter that allows the other to change and move. In the therapeutic setting, the therapist is moving with the client, and can feel course changes immediately and respond in the interest of the client, himself and their relationship. This can mean slowing down the process, guiding in a new direction etc. This parallels with the activities “pacing and leading” as described by Bandler and Grinder in their early NLP work.

#### **4. Systemic Sculpture Work with Groups and Families**

Sculpture work with families was first made popular by the American family therapist, Virginia Satir in the 1960s and 70s. The principles are quite simple: Couples and families were asked to build a human sculpture using themselves as the raw material, the clay. The sculpture should reflect how the people saw themselves in relationship to one another. The families were instructed to use gestures such as pointing, looking away, kneeling or crouching, protective postures etc. to demonstrate what they perceived as the prevailing mood and hierarchy in their family system. Often differing sculptures would emerge, and a learning process occurred in the act of finding a solution that included all the family members’ perceptions. The resulting plastic, three-dimensional product was (and is still) an extremely useful tool to help family members understand each other and find ways to change together in positive ways.

Sculpture work has the added benefit of helping people become more aware of their emotions and physicality. It supports them in learning to trust their bodies and feelings as instruments that can give them useful information about our situation and our inner life.

In the late 80s and early 90s, Bert Hellinger, an Austrian psychotherapist, added a fresh wind to this procedure in that he started using non-family members, for example group members, as his raw material. In addition, only one involved participant would make his or her sculpture out of these strangers. Both surprising and moving was the discovery that the sculpture participants, knowing only little or even nothing about the problem situation being dramatized, would often report emotional and bodily responses in their assigned positions that accurately paralleled the experience of the family members.

#### **4.1. Real People Involved**

As I began doing psychological supervision with teams of health professionals in the early 90s, I found this form of dynamic problem montage could often bring a new perspective into problem situations that had been not solvable through normal discourse and analysis. The Ps could more readily laugh at themselves and their situations, and an unconscious learning, a willingness to try out new possibilities using a physical awareness not previously available.

My first lesson in therapeutic sculpture happened, as is so often the case, in an unusual setting. I didn't recognize its value for months, if not years.

.... I am sitting at the feet of the guru, and it is a great honor to be here. I have been chosen...It is December, 1982, in Puri, southwest India. This afternoon the air is hot, sticky, and motionless. Everyone is sweating freely, the women wrapped in Saris, the men in baggy pants and loose fitting cotton shirts. The shaded veranda should be a little cooler than the glaring sunlight on the gravel drive, but the devotees crowding around us, pressing forward and craning to see the spectacle, exude a pungent, palpable mist that robs any possible feeling of relief or refrigeration. The Guru has instructed me to demonstrate my "healing powers". Somewhere along the way I was foolish enough to mention that I do breathing therapy with my clients in Germany, and now I am supposed to show him! Lying on his back is my "subject", is a most reluctant Indian man, large in height and girth even by western standards, with heavy rimmed glasses with lenses like the bottom of coke bottles. He won't take them off even though he's supposed to keep his eyes closed, and now and then he sneaks a sideways peek in my direction. He has a reputation for disliking people from the west and makes no effort to disguise his discomfort. His respect for (and fear of invoking the wrath of) our Baba is stronger than his revulsion and humiliation. Of course he doesn't speak English, I have no skills in Hindi or Urdu or whatever his language is, so all my finely tuned therapeutic instructions ( "breathe deep...relaax on the exhale....let go of your body---surrennnnnder to gravity...") are being translated by one of the Indian men who speaks a little English, and that is a generous estimate. He mostly wobbles his head with a big grin every time I ask him if my instructions are reaching the "patient" with any

degree of accuracy. I am feeling cramped, my field of vision and overall awareness shrinking, my own breathing shallow and strained. If I could only shut that all out and do a good job!

After what was probably about 5 minutes of this struggle, but which seemed like an hour to me, our Baba breaks it off, strands up, frowns and shakes his head with a loud

“No good!”

He sweeps off the veranda followed by most of the entourage. I am dumbfounded and near paralysis. What had happened? We shouldn't stop now, we had hardly gotten started. I knew I had somehow messed things up, but I wasn't sure how or what to do next...

As I said before, I don't know exactly when, but sometime later I realized he was telling me with a physical picture, a warm human “sculpture” experience, that to do good healing work with others, I needed to make sure my setting, my subject and myself all fit together. Even if the “Guru” says go, I have to learn to trust my god-given senses of sight, hearing, smell, touch etc as well as plain old common sense. If I had just paid a little more attention to my gut reaction and listened less to the voices in my head, I would have probably recognized how ridiculous (and ridiculously funny) the situation was.

#### **4.2. A Beginner's Guide to Practical Taoism...or How Aikido Enhances Sculpture Work**

Recently in a supervision group for family therapists, one woman was reporting on her work with a couple that had recently separated and the ensuing custody fight over their nine year old son. It was fairly evident from how the therapist was describing the interactions that she had a biased stance, which she even admitted when her colleagues gave her that feedback. The intellectual understanding didn't seem to help her much though. At one point in her narration she said, “ I'd really like to set this guy straight, just tell him to back off and stop harassing his wife,...” Before she could go on I interrupted her with “Wait, show us that!” At first she was confused, so I asked her if she would be willing to make a 3 dimensional picture of what she was describing. She picked out 4 “actors”, i.e. one for each of the family members and one portraying herself. Then she moved them around so they represented the scene in which she is giving this father a piece of her mind. We saw the mother and son standing next to each other, the father is standing across from them, and the substitute therapist is standing between the two parties, facing the father with her arms extended in front of her and her palms raised in his direction. The therapist forming the sculpture instructed the “father” to act like he was reading from and writing on a note pad, the “mother “was arranged in a fighting stance, left hand

balled in a fist and right hand held up with the index finger extended. The “son” just stood there observing.

Then I asked the players to just feel their bodies, notice tensions or discomfort, and report on these feelings and accompanying thoughts:

- The “son” said he felt lonely and a little sad, not really connected to what was going on.
- The “mother” said she felt like fighting, but underneath she felt scared and further uncertain because she couldn’t really see her ex-husband.
- The “father” reported that he was so busy defending himself and discounting the “therapist”, by ticking off facts from his note pad, he hardly felt his body and had very little awareness of the other “family members”.
- The “Therapist” said she was aware of anger and tension in her body, at the same time felt uneasy about not being able to see the “mother” and “son”.

Our “artist”, when looking at her work, saw immediately, as did the rest of the group, that from her position in the sculpture it was impossible to help that family. She was astounded at the intensity of her feelings in the situation, knew she was following some personal inner agenda, but couldn’t say what that was.

I asked her to go stand in her place in the sculpture, and when she was there for a few moments, standing in the blocking pose with arms outstretched, I asked her if that position felt familiar. After about 2 seconds her face lit up and she said “ I know what this is about” and went on to describe the fights she had with her own father when she was a teenager. The whole process took perhaps a half an hour. Her body knew the answers. From the moment she clearly felt and saw the cause of her reactions, she could relax and move out of the way.



(Fig. 1)



(Fig. 2)

In stepping aside and just being there for the family, the other participants noticed they too were immediately freed to look around and also experience a complexity of thoughts and feelings about their situation. In the safety of a third person whose role was to assist and guide and not take sides and fight, the participants reported the following:

- The “son” said he felt no longer sad, but rather curious about what would happen next;
- The “mother” said she still wanted to fight it out with her “ex”, but that she felt safer, and more confident of a positive outcome;
- The “father” remarked that he could no longer use his note pad as a defence, and like his son, his curiosity was aroused.<sup>1</sup>
- The development illustrated in this sculpture work demonstrates one of the basic principles of Aikido, namely: Get Out Of The Way!
- To control a force moving in your direction, especially a strong one, the first step is not to tense up and try to block it (you might just get mowed down!) but rather to first step aside, and then learn to connect and move with it. But to be able to do all that you have start from a place of relaxed aware inner calm.

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<sup>1</sup> A further interesting aspect emerged through this work: When the therapist stood in the circle between son and father, the mother reported feeling somewhat left alone and defenceless. When the “therapist” then stood between “mother” and “father“, the mother felt better, but then the son said he didn’t like that so much, preferring the therapist next to him. The ensuing discussion revealed that the actual therapist perceived all the members of the family as being quite needy, and recognized through the sculpture that perhaps the job was just too big for a single therapist to handle. The session ended with the therapist asking one of her male colleagues if he would be available to do co-therapy with her and the family.

### 4.3. Centering

We often start Aikido training with the following exercise: Either standing or kneeling, we hold our hands in front of our bellies, shoulders relaxed, palms facing inwards. With a long, slow inhale we let the hands and arms rise up and apart, imaging that the movement is happening by itself. The image can be of strings attached to the backs of the hands, and the hands being pulled like those of a marionette. Or, and I prefer this image, a ball of energy, like an expanding balloon, is pushing the hands and arms apart. If you try this four or five times, and then intentionally raise and lower your arms using muscle power, you will probably notice a difference. In the first case most people experience their arms as light and the motion as practically effortless. In the second, the arms are felt as being more solid and heaving, the experience is more one of working or exertion.

Actually in this simple exercise demonstrates two basic principles of Taoism.

The first is that everything comes out of nothing.

The second is that the universe happens without our trying. (Ref. Laura Perls' "Don't Push the River")

Related to principle number one, atomic physics showed us that most of material existence consists of empty space - at least at the atomic level. Solidity is an illusion. Everything is moving all the time.

Point two: Life happens, worlds evolve and disappear. We are just a part of this huge movement. Our little beings don't have much influence on the big plan. So why worry so much, everything is happening anyway.

This doesn't mean we shouldn't participate; of course we need to be involved with our lives. It's just that the more we try, and the more we struggle to make things go the way we think they should, the more we block life's energy and the less can happen. When we trust the flow, we allow space, the state of being that comes out of nothingness, and then things can happen on their own. When the melodic voice of our new found love calls us from across the street, we turn our heads, and our whole bodies, without thinking or trying. It just happens.

I compare this difference between stuck-ness and flowing-ness, to stone and water. Water doesn't fight with the resistance it meets along its way; it just flows around the boulders. And with time the boulders wear down.

As a preparation for sculpture work I will often ask participants to take a few minutes and, through the exercise above, get the feeling of flowing. Starting from this feeling of empowered lightness, they become quite sensitized to the blocked energy, struggle and tension that characteristically emerge in sculpture work as a problem situation is given a physical form.

In another example, a social worker was trying to help a single mother deal with her wayward and precocious 14 year old daughter. The girl was cutting classes in school, staying out past her curfew to hang out with a group of older teens of whom the mother did not approve, and basically ignoring and/or resisting her mother's efforts to set limits. The social worker said the mother acted helpless and depressed when she would tell of her troubles with her daughter. She said "I feel so sorry for her, I wish I could help her." The social worker said her (the social worker) efforts to influence the daughter to be more considerate and obedient had up to that point produced minimal results. We asked the social worker to make a model of her relationship to this family and the sculpture looked like this:



(Fig. 3)

The "mother" has her arms folded across her belly and is looking at the floor;

The "daughter" is standing across from her "mother", her arms are folded across her chest, her body turned somewhat away, and she is looking away over her shoulder;

The "social worker" is standing next to the "mother", looking at the "daughter", with one arm on the "mothers'" shoulder, the other arm outstretched with the palm up in the direction of the "daughter". Her upper body is also leaning slightly in the "daughter's" direction.

The "daughter" said her defiance even increased when she saw this woman ganging up with her mother against her;

The "mother" said she didn't notice much, the hand on her shoulder was indeed nice, but otherwise she was too preoccupied with her worries.

Interestingly, when I asked the colleague playing the social worker how she felt, she complained of lower back pains and said the whole situation felt burdensome. However, her colleague, the woman who was actually working with the family, reported feeling fine when she stepped into her position! I asked her what she meant and she said she "felt" she needed to be there, that she

“should” help the poor woman. It took a while to get her to differentiate between what she thought was right and what her body was actually feeling, (Just like the author at the feet of the master!) When she did start tuning in to what her body was telling her, she had to admit she felt somewhat uncomfortable. She didn’t know where or how she “should” stand (another symptom of trying to solve problems with the head alone) so I suggested she move around the room and pay attention to her body, and to any changes or reactions she notices in the other two participants. When she got to place a little back from and between the “mother” and “daughter”, she said “ I can stay here, this is OK”.



(Fig. 4)



(Fig. 5)

We all noticed that the “daughter” was no longer looking away, but sneaking peeks at the social worker out of the corner of her eye. Her shoulders also had moved somewhat in the direction of her “mother” and the social worker. She said she still felt resistant, but was also a little interested in what would happen next. The “mother” had raised her head slightly and was looking back and forth between the social worker and her “daughter”. She said she felt a little more alive, and was vacillating between a budding curiosity and remaining sceptical.

## 5. Summary

When we practice or observe Aikido at its best, we don’t see some great martial artist defeating, annihilating his opponents, who then lie crushed and immobile on the ground. Instead, we witness an open give and take, a flowing together, going apart, connecting and disconnecting. Sometimes someone falls or rolls on the ground, only to continue the motion back to her feet and again connect to the other(s). Even when one person is controlling another in a grip or lock, the purpose is not to hurt the other, and if done right, the effect is more like a stretching and massage exercise than a punishment.

This is paralleled in the work integrating aikido body and energy awareness into sculpture work. The participants gain a physical knowledge of when a relationship allows the parties involved to move and change together, and when this is blocked.

The most fascinating aspect of this work is its simplicity. It simply works. In almost every situation where I have experimented with this model, the participants could easily get into their body sensations, playing the parts of total strangers and having reactions to their assigned roles. The ineffective positioning of the participants becomes instantly evident; possible alternatives offering enhanced options evolve naturally. The participants often report that they prefer this kind of work to intellectual analysis, which may result in understanding but often offers no way out of presenting problems. Members of my supervision groups report further, that after a sculpture session, things start moving in a more efficacious direction in their work with the portrayed clients, groups and families.



(Fig. 6)



(Fig. 7)

Of course there are no magical solution being presented here, but the working conditions, the atmosphere in which change can happen has been enhanced enormously. We could say stone has changed to water. And that is Aikido, transforming a stuck and contrary encounter to one where stuck situations, emotions, and people can come into the flow.

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