



TENDO-RYU
AIKIDO
DEN HAAG

THE UKEMI IN AIKIDO BY KENJI SHIMIZU

“You should think of ukemi as being the secret to aikido”. This is my personal experience. During my uchideshi time the founder made me fall without questioning, on top of this I was scolded mercilessly when my ukemi was bad. I had so many painful experiences, that I continuously worried about whether there would be ever any progress, if I would do things like this. Having made it in Judo to the fourth dan grade and thinking I did good ukemi, I doubted that I had to be scolded like this.

But that was a mistake. I had forgotten to put Judo aside and start from zero. I only took my ukemi as I pleased. Yet I was made to become aware of the fact, that my body didn't move as one with o-sensei's body. When I think about it now I feel ashamed, that I thought it would be good just to take a showy ukemi.

Ukemi means reading your partner's breath, and if one will not respond towards the nage (the person who throws) you cannot speak of true ukemi. Mastering ukemi means noticing the signs of your environment, which enables you to deal promptly with the circumstances. The bamboo for examples moves according to the relative strength of the wind, and when the wind stops, the bamboo returns to its original state. That is completely natural and it is alive. In aikido we don't fight for victory or defeat. It is a way where we improve ourselves through training by repeating the techniques. It is important that you always can correspond with shite (the person, who is executing the technique) whom you are facing. This however is very difficult.

Though it is hard to learn a natural ukemi, an ukemi without force, you have made a huge progress in your technique whenever your body understands a little bit more about it. That may be, because you have learnt to utilize the executing person's breath power in your own technique. And in my case, I was uke of o-sensei...

It is important to experience naturally strong techniques. If you cannot do ukemi soft and flexible, it is most likely, that you cannot execute a technique soft and flexible. The natural ukemi in aikido also makes you understand life.



PRINCIPLES OF AIKIDO

according to Shimizu Sensei

Aikido techniques, originally based on ancient Jujutsu, are exceedingly effective for actual combat. So dangerous are the techniques that no competition system has been adopted for Aikido, and traditionally it has been taught through the method of form repetition. Aikido techniques principally use empty-handed movements, without any weapons. Composed primarily of Nage (throwing), Kime (blocking) and Osae (pinning and controlling) techniques. Aikido is executed with breathing power and joint manipulation, as well as by calculating the proper Ma-ai (distance between one and the other) and by using the opponent's force and physical weak points to one's own advantage.

Controlling and opponent at the moment of his weakness allows one to break his balance as he shifts his center of gravity, thus making it possible to execute Nage, Kime and Osae techniques. If one properly takes advantage of an opponent's weaknesses, one can execute easily Kansetsu-wzas (joint techniques) or Atemi-wzas (striking-vital-spot techniques). Kansetsu-wzas include the skillful manipulations of shoulders, elbows or wrists. The Tekubi-wzas (wrist techniques) are characteristic of Aikido and they surpass similar techniques in other martial arts. Tekubi-wzas are very effective and make it possible for a small person to control a large person.

The applications of Atemi-wzas are fundamentally different from the Ate techniques of Karate. While the Karate techniques Ate, Tsuki and Keri focus on attack-to-destroy combat, the principle of Aikido's Atemi techniques is to momentarily disturb an opponent's Ki with Kime, Nage or Osae executions. Atemi techniques seek not to destroy an opponent, but to control him by simply striking him with the hand or elbow at the moment he loses his balance. This principle explains why training that involves hitting something solid with a clenched fist does not exist in Aikido.

Aikido techniques are often executed with circular movements accompanied by a body twist, as well as upward or downward bending-stretching motions, to dodge an opponent's attack. The techniques include both centrifugal and centripetal movements, although the former are more common. Since training in these techniques involves muscular stretching and contacting, these techniques help to improve blood circulation and internal organ function. Repeated training of joint techniques helps the body become more supple and resilient, keeping the back from becoming stiff or weak. For this reason Aikido is recognized as extraordinarily efficacious in improving health and in preventing geriatric weakness. Historically, the Japanese have been people who have respected courtesy, this virtue, however, seem endangered these days.

As it is said, "Rei (courtesy, politeness, salutation) is maintained by preparedness"; it is wisdom for avoiding disputes. Nonviolence is indeed better than forced victory, but if we close our eyes fearfully when faced with injustice, the unreasonable will remain

and the reasonable may be lost. We will be obliged to inhabit an outrageous world where the weak are always victims of the strong. It is thus necessary to prepare ourselves for defending justice against atrocities. We named this preparation Bu. As has been said repeatedly since the old days, "Start with Rei and finish with Rei". Rein and Bu co-exist and prevent the weak from being habitually beaten.

It is not possible to establish a healthy and humane world without helping the weak and stopping the strong when necessary. We must have courage to recognize the person with the poisonous attitude and lead him from it. To realize this courage and to improve technique, we must become sensitive to Sakki (threatening atmosphere) or Kehai (sign) and obtain the flexible body movements that allow prompt response of the nervous and muscular systems.

Today, insensitive behaviors and annoying attitudes are frighteningly common. I wonder if all of society has become so dulled that nobody even worries about it. In the old days, a Samurai who was not capable of perceiving a sign or atmosphere and acting spontaneously could lose his life. An insensitive Samurai could not survive. This is also true today; it is possible to survive without being physically strong, but insensitivity would be one's demise. The society that is insensitive to others holds the fatal weakness within itself.

STRENGTH

There are very skillful persons and less skillful persons. One who appears good and strong is not always good and strong. Even though one may be proud of one's techniques, their value is relative because one may face someone stronger than oneself. Therefore, one must rely on the spirit that resides in the depths of one's own technique.

Strength is developed by continual training. This permits one to acquire both mental patience and resistance, spiritual qualities that allow one to support and control one's own body. In other words, when mind and body work together, the effects will be multiplied and one's strength will be fully active. Here is an example. Draw a circle. Keep repeating the circle, drawing one on top of the others. What happens? The mass of circles drawn looks like a sphere. A sphere is free to spin in any direction, while remaining stable and powerful.

Aikido depends not on innate skillfulness but on steady and continual training. Continual practice requires patience, which leads one to become strong in spiritual and physical resistance. Real strength will be acquired in cultivating the mental ability to control the body freely.

THE IDEA OF KOKYU-RYOKU IN AIKIDO

Kokyu-ryoku, which literally means "respiration power", has in Aikido a significance beyond the functional strength of inhalation and exhalation. Here, it includes the power from Seika-tanden (the natural body's center and gravity, about two inches below the navel). In the other words, Kokyu-ryoku is the enhanced power caused by unifying one's spirit with one's body, the power of abdominal breathing and by absorbing, at the right time, the power of the adversary's movements.

In Aikido, it is important to completely absorb the adversary's power within one's own Kokyu-ryoku. That is to say, Kokyu-ryoku is the power resulting from the unification of consciousness, breath power, and body.

UKEMI AND THE ROLE OF SHITE (NAGE) AND UKE

In Aikido training, there is the supposition of two rules: Shite (the leading body) and Uke (the passive body). The basic idea of practice is for Shite to use Uke's power, while both acknowledge the weakness in Uke's position and the fact that Uke is simply the complementary counterpart of Shite himself. Practice of this sort allows the conversion of weakness into strength and the development of self-confidence and spiritual energy. By finding and disciplining one's own weak points, one's capacity and *raison d'être* will be found.

WHAT IS KI?

Every person possesses Ki power by nature, and with discipline this Ki can grow. Since the old days it has been said, 'Even a small one-inch caterpillar has a one-half-inch-big soul', 'Weak Ki cause's illness', 'Bring up your Ki!' (Careful! Attention!), or 'don't let you Ki loosen' (Be cautious). A person's condition is largely determined by the state of their Ki.

In Aikido, a disciple trains himself through Hanpuku-geiko (repeated training) of techniques and kokyu-ho (breathing method) to unify his spirit and body. Thus, he creates a resonance from heart to body and from body to heart. As a result of this circular resonance, both the spiritual body and the physical spirit grow. Something then reaches to the source of spirit, mind, soul, Kokyu, and body, which everyone possesses. This something that grows continuously is, I believe, what we in Aikido call Ki.

TENDO-RYU AIKIDO

'Sincerity is the Way of Heaven', so Tendo (the Way of Heaven) must be sincere. The training of men must be to manifest this sincerity in their pursuit of the Way. According to Sontoku Ninomiya, being sincere is to eliminate the self. Then what does eliminating the self mean? It means to overcome oneself. Overcoming the self is to realize Tendo.

Self means the self of the deluded mind, that is, the lazy self, filled with idle, earthly thoughts. It is a small self. By overcoming this self and by becoming the true, pure self of no-mind, one can realize Tendo.

In Tendo-ryu Aikido, the basis teaching is this spirit of Tendo. The goal of training does not lie in defeating others but in "overcoming ourselves". We all train morning and night with a true mind in order to realize Tendo. The true mind is the spirit of continuous training, self-denial and diligence which should be our basic principle when training in Tendo-ryu Aikido.

I believe that it is this self-denial and diligence that leads to the correct martial arts spirit for this degenerating and confused modern society, and those who practice this spirit will be the most effective in hewing out our future.

