

**SENSEI'S BLOGS:**

May 2009

**Important Aikido Concepts (Part 3)**

**Some Key points in the Aiki Framework**

Conceptually, a three tiered model helped me to understand the evolution of aiki arts -

**Aikijujutsu**

**Aikido**

**Aiki**



Aiki



Aikido



Aikijujutsu

We can advance through these stages over time. Can we start at the Aiki level? I don't believe so.

My experience says we need to start at the beginning – learn to understand our human system (body, mind, spirit) and then learn to use it fully through structured practice. In the first level we must learn how to make and receive powerful, well directed attacks with a controlled but aggressive partner. The lack of this early training underscores most peoples' dismissal of Aikido as a martial art of any consequence. To avoid confusion and potential harm, I believe aikido styles that don't include this early stage may be better off changing the name of their practice to something else.

We can think of Aikijujutsu as learning to use our bodies energy; Aikido as learning to use our energy in concert with our partners energy and Aiki as learning to channel our partners energy more completely. My interpretation of these training stages is to link them to 3 strategic interventions that are also potentially progressive -

- Reactive** – events based
- Responsive** – perceiving the patterns beneath events
- Creative** – creating the patterns that determine event

<b>Events – Based</b>	<b>Patterns</b> (of Behaviour)	<b>Systemic Structure</b>
<b>Reactive</b>	<b>Responsive</b>	<b>Generative</b>
	<b>Magnetise positive realities</b>	<b>Create reality</b>

**Continuum**



I don't associate these strategies/interventions with any human value statements (bad, better, good) but accept that they just are. My belief and experience is that we can increase the percentage of creative and responsive





strategies we employ in life over time by embodying these concepts through training. A simple example of these strategies in application is:

**Reactive** – walking home you are attacked by a mugger and successfully defend yourself

**Responsive** – Walking home you choose a street or time when there is no mugger

**Creative** – By taking Aikido practice and philosophy into our community, we contribute to the lack of need for a mugger to exist in our community

Is this an idealistic world view? Absolutely - and I don't accept any other. Idealism is looked on in the wider world of give and take as a weakness, yet I believe Aikido is one of the paths towards realising our existence as our ideal selves. Why settle for less?

Many of the discussions regards the 'effectiveness' of Aikido would be better served by drawing the above distinctions. On what level do we want to measure effectiveness? What are the criteria and assessment tools? On whose/which standards do we baseline for success?

I then connect these three strategies to the stages of learning described in the concept of '**Shu** (learn the form) / **Ha** (break the form) / **Ri** (create the form)'.

Those who have mastered any trade will recognise Shu/Ha/Ri as

**Shu** – how to do it the way it is done

**Ha** – how to do it the way it isn't done

**Ri** – how to do it the way (when) it can't be done

I do also conceptually link the 3 strategies to timing. (**sen, sensen no sen, go no sen**)

These timings are then directly linked to **Tenkan, Omote and Irimi** and determine the way the technique unfolds because of the relationship between uke and shitei in terms of the way power and speed differ under each of these timings.

**Irimi** – to enter – preemptive. Uke has decided to attack, breathes in and muscles / tendons / ki contracts in preparation – shitei counters at that precise moment as the ki withdraws. Requires Uke to give physical and breath signals in the early stages to learn it. Requires that shitei closes the maai.

**Omote** – to the front – awase / equal timing/force/speed. Uke attacks and shitei meets that attack equally, releases the line while maintaining the maai and leads uke to their front.

**Tenkan (Ura)** – to turn (or move behind). Shitei opens the maai as the attack unfolds encouraging uke to move across the space.





The next key point is called **Te no Uchi**. This literally means the inside of the hand and I believe that this is quintessential to understanding and practising Aiki arts.

The two shapes for attack are **Honte** (true / natural) and **Gyakute** (back / opposite). Honte is where the focus of power is in the little finger side of the hand, while gyakute stresses power in the thumb side. My direct experience is that Aikido cannot take place without a clear understanding on the part of both uke and shitei of the ramifications of these positions. These underpin shape, line of power and elbow/hip relationship. Attacks from honte where the shitei tries to direct the elbow outside will go against the line of power and vice versa. **Critically, the lack of a serious study of swordsmanship alongside Aikido has diminished this understanding until it is now rarely seen or experienced.** (Even though I have studied it, I do not include Aiki ken as a 'serious study of swordsmanship')

I believe most basic techniques (not just nage waza) comprise three phases - **Kuzushi** (balance break), **Tsukuri** (prepare positionally) and **Kake** (attack / apply). My experience is these don't always follow this particular order. It is also my experience that we need to be aware of what we are trying to achieve during technique and how it relates to the above sequence. I believe that this can be applied to that conundrum of 'what is effective?' in Aikido. With reasonable experience and full consciousness of what we are doing, we can 'make it work!' I don't mean by physical force – I mean by **creative force**. This is worth consideration especially for those who wish to teach.

It is also critical to understand that the above conditions of Irimi, Omote and Tenkan are not strict rules – I believe they suggest and describe the principle by which Aiki is effected. Capture the moment of the attack and use up our opponents energy in the way that is appropriate and harmonious to that occasion. There really are no rules. We need to learn and study these things until we can completely forget them!

**How can we learn / embody these things and finally 'forget' them? What conditions need to prevail for this to take place?**

I refer you to an article written by my teacher which has been published in the excellent book titled "Sword & Spirit" Classical Warrior Traditions of Japan Vol 2 by Dianne Skoss. The article is headed "Uchidachi and Shidachi". Nishioka Sensei eloquently explains the critical element that is absent in so much Bujutsu / Budo and how restoring this balance can bring our practice back to what he sees as its path.

**There is an element in his premise that could be viewed as unimportant from a practical viewpoint, however the spirit he describes between Shidachi and Uchidachi also has an extremely important practical and technical application. The failure to see this makes a great deal of Aikido practice quite worthless.**

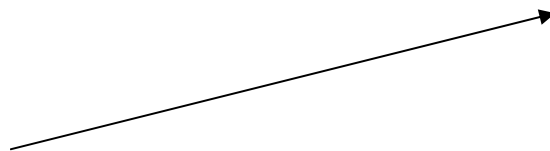


How often do we see an Aikidoka successfully gain a perfectly good Ikkajo (Ikkyo) ... and then go through a complex change to Sankajo (Sankyo) for absolutely no reason whatsoever. I have posed this question to various very senior people in the Aikido world many times and met with only blank stares and responses like “I decided I wanted to do Sankajo” or “because I am practising Sankajo”. The reason for the change is visible immediately to any Koryu trained person - Uchidachi moved differently at the time leading Shidachi to the next level of the technique. While we perceive/treat Uke (Uchidachi) as the junior and their role as secondary, we miss the point that to learn the permutations of the kata and waza we need an uke who already knows the permutations and leads us through them in accord with our progress. It cannot be stressed too much that the warping of this spirit/relationship will always cause problems.

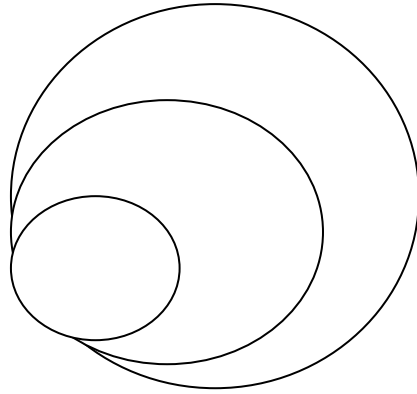
Perhaps the most pertinent question now for us is “**What can Aikido be?**”

Again, Nishioka Sensei stresses that all martial arts start and end with [Rei ho](#). This is a complex notion however it might be understood as the spirit / condition through which everything finds its place in the universe and we can recognise that it is indeed all as it should be. In this context, Aiki can be considered a path along which we practice the spirit of Rei ho.

The Aikido we principally study and practise in AMAI Dojos combines the influence of [Yoshinkan](#) & [Shinto Muso Ryu](#). We use the name [Shinto Muso Ryu Aiki](#) to honour Nishioka Sensei and to clearly state the nature of the art as distinct from the other Aikido Ryu ha. It is neither better nor worse than any other because these aren't valid descriptors in a world such as Budo. There is the art the way we choose to study it - and then there are a multitude of others. Their very diversity is a sign of the health of the art. It has long been Nishioka Senseis' goal that Shinto Muso Ryu would reinforce once more a positive synthesis of swordsmanship and Aikido riai. His advice to me is that this development is not another or a new idea. Rather he believes it is a move along the original path of the art. This is an interesting model because we often see learning as progressive and progressive as linear. Learning that way would of course look like this ...



Instead Nishioka Sensei represents it like this ... an endless returning to the source ... each time taking the essence and extending it into another realm.



Again, I want to stress that the above ideas are neither right nor wrong – they are simply a distillation of my experience and I hope that by sharing them we can all progress well and truly in an art we all love.

**David**