

The Seidokan Communicator

Aikido for a Modern Way of Life

Focusing on the Process of Training

By Doug Wedell

Seidokan Aikido of South Carolina was once again pleased to have Dan Kawakami Sensei lead training at our annual Spring Seminar. As this was Kawakami Sensei's fourth visit with us, many club members eagerly anticipated more lessons in sitting, standing breathing, and walking, all while blending with an attacker or perhaps just with gravity and our own turbulent minds.

We all know that it is important to build one's Aikido on a firm foundation, one grounded in the principles that we realize in our training and our daily lives. Kawakami Sensei explained that the focus of the seminar was on the process of aikido training, a process that leads us to delve more deeply into the principles and the reality of the moment. To help us develop good training habits, Sensei began by examining basic ki tests, such as keeping one-point and extension of ki. Right away, one must throw out the outcome oriented view of trying not to move or not to let one's arm bend, as a focus on outcomes leads us away from the realization of the Aiki principles. Instead, the process is largely one of eliminating unnecessary thoughts, tensions, and tactics. The process is simply the maintenance of oneness no matter how circumstances may change.

Sensei provided us with a nice illustration of this process in an exercise on leading. In it, uke stands firm, steadfast, and refusing to move. Nage comes up beside him, puts his arm around his shoulder and naturally begins to move in a mutually agreeable direction. When done correctly, there is no way to resist. Rather, uke simply starts walking together with nage. There is no thought of resistance because nage has no intention to move uke. The process is simply one of uniting with uke and moving oneself. Since uke is a part of the extended self, both persons move harmoniously together.

Based on this exercise we applied different techniques, looking to make the effortless transition we experienced in the exercise a part of the process of our basic Aikido movements. Especially applicable to this exercise were Kokyunage and Makiotoshi. There were a lot of Ah-ha's resulting from these effortless kokyunages. But there were also lots of slaps to one's own forehead as one realized yet again that outcomes had crept into the mind, obscuring the process and presenting a stern obstacle to completing the movement. Naturally, the obstacle lay within one's own attitude, easily defeated through self victory.

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We also spent a lot of time working with ikkyo, which requires a true cutting motion. This in turn requires a clear mind, a stable base, and free movement unencumbered by potential obstacles. Often students would find themselves pushing, pulling, twisting and grabbing. Then Sensei would come by and demonstrate that the movement is a simple cut, nothing more. We also did similar types of unimpeded cutting movements in jonage applications of nikyo and kotegaeshi. The lesson over and again was that the process of focusing on oneness and moving oneself was critical to smooth execution of the techniques.

Another place where the mind is often cluttered with unwanted thoughts is in jiu waza. Here one typically considers what attack is coming, then selects a defense, executes it, and then deals with the resulting situation, which typically is another attack coming when the last defense did not work. We began by sitting in seiza and using the simplest blending motion (shomenuchi Ikkyo undo) to harmonize with an oncoming yokomenuchi attack. After moving to standing position, we then saw how simple defenses such as irimi nage and makiotoshi easily flowed from this initial blend. Moving back to seiza, we worked with a similar defense to munetsuki and then worked back to standing to work on simple defenses such as kotegaeshi. After this preliminary work, we encountered either attack along with follow-up attacks in a jiu waza exercise. Again, it was easy to experience the clashing of wills and conflict resulting from a process built on outcomes rather than a process in which blending was the true focus.

Finally, each session ended with kokyu dosa, an exercise in blending that helps remind the partners of keeping a stable center and finding oneness. Seidokan Aikido of South Carolina is very grateful to Kawakami Sensei for sharing his perspectives and his marvelous kiai with us. At 76 years of age, Kawakami is a wonderful resource for those of us in Seidokan Aikido, providing keen insights from his many years of training. Domo Arigato Gozaimashita, Sensei!

One Magical Night in Salt Lake City.

by Mike and Kim Finnegan

Even after twenty plus years of practicing Aikido, we are always anxious before stepping on the mat before a special workout. The night of February 22, 2007 when Sensei Dan Kawakami from Orange County, California, joined us in Salt Lake City, Utah was no exception.

Kawakami Sensei happened into the Salt Lake City area this winter for a family vacation. He humbly asked to visit with the Utah Seidokan members during a workout. Hosted by Ahsa Aikido at the Cottonwood High School, Kawakami Sensei generously taught students from three different dojos. Attending his workout were Dale Peterson Sensei and members of Petersen Family Dojo, Kerry Gallegos Sensei and members from the Utah Police Academy, and Audrey Nelson Sensei and members of Asha Aikido Dojo. Needless to say the mat was filled with eager, empty cups ready to learn.

The aiki-taiso channeled energy into productive, focused pre-technique and as the evening started, anxiousness turned to anticipation. When Kawakami Sensei stepped up to Shomen, all thoughts turned to the secrets he would share. Simple secrets of walking, balance, and control. Not control of uke, but control of nage—of ourselves. He stressed posture and softness to find strength in our Aikido. The wisdom of the night was vast and absorbed so gently as to almost feel as though we learned through osmosis, through seeing and imitating, giving and receiving.

And when the night was done, how many techniques were taught? Only one that could be named. Irmi-otoshi. Yet our empty cups had been filled. We stepped off the mat with smiles and warmth from all that Kawakami Sensei generously shared with us. Thank you Kawakami Sensei and please visit us again soon.

Photos from South Carolina Seminar



Kawakami Sensei with uke's Jarred Wittaker (top) and Suzanne Burgess (below).

Kawakami Sensei in South Carolina



A Perspective on Testing

Duangnapa Prommachak

I have been interested about martial arts, especially "Aikido", since I was in Thailand. I have seen people practice Judo, Karate, Taw Kwon Do and Boxing. When I first saw Aikido, I saw different things, and I was wondering how they can drop people down. It seemed that they just moved, no crashing, no pouncing, and it looked smooth and smart. It is much different from other martial arts.

I have the opportunity to practice Aikido at Southside Dojo. I have been practicing for almost five months. I usually attend three classes per week. Now, I have the opportunity to test for the first blue belt. Allison Young is my Uke for my first test.

These are the reasons that I considered for promotion. My first reason is that I would like to prove myself. The significance of this is that I would like to know how many Aikido skills that I have. I would like to test myself to see that I exactly understand the principles of Aikido, and that I do the right techniques. In my opinion, I think it is the same as when we go to school and we have a test to measure our skills. If we are good enough, we can go on to the next level. My other reason is that I saw another person take a test. That impressed me and I would like to know the feeling that they had. If I pass the test, it will be a great experience in my life, and I might have more confidence to work with new people. I still remember the first time I came to practice. I did not know what I should do, or how would I do. I needed advice on the Aiki Taiso and how to do the techniques correctly. I might be prepared for these things now, but if I am not, it will be a good lesson for next time.

I am preparing for the test by practicing the principles of Aikido and practicing the techniques. When I am practicing, I feel that I am very comfortable doing the koteagaeshi technique. It is the first technique in my mind to defend myself. The skill that I need more practice is to control my relaxation. When I am thinking about the process of the technique, my muscles usually tense up and so the technique is not successful.

The most significant thing that I have learned is Masakatsu Agatsu "true victory is victory over oneself." This is important to me because I am meeting various people everyday and people are acting in different ways with different attitudes and with different styles. Sometimes, I do not like the way others think and I do not like the words that they say. I can not change them, but I can change my attitude, and I tell myself that people are different. I can not control other people, but I can only control my mind and my reactions.

At first, I just wanted to learn to protect myself. However, after practicing the principles and techniques, I find Aikido has become central to my life. This is evident as I can now control myself and remain peaceful. It is very useful for me to use the principles of Aikido in real life situations. Aikido has a strong influence in my life because I can live with different people in harmony and peace.

Expanding Aiki Taiso Reps

By Doug Wedell

The aiki taiso exercises encompass the basic movements of Aikido. Practicing them can thereby provide invaluable training in correct posture, movement, rhythm and flow. Such training represents a firm foundation on which to build one's aikido.

How can we get the most out of our aiki taiso training? Clearly, there should be regularly spaced lessons that emphasize a particular aiki taiso exercise, demonstrating its correct execution, how to test to determine if the exercise is being correctly executed, and how the exercise can be applied in specific techniques and in daily life.

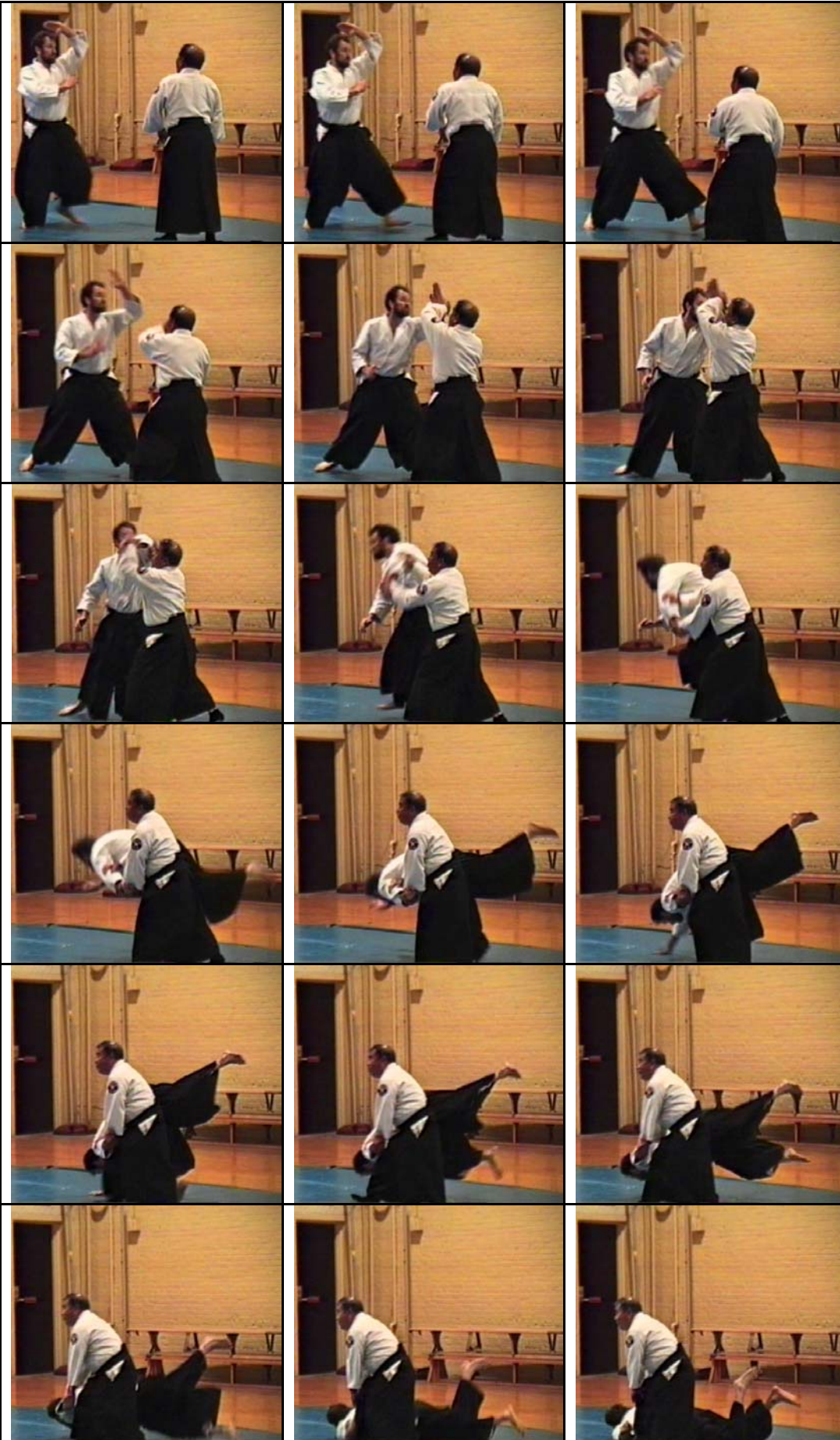
Additionally, it seems to me that a simple way to develop better rhythm and flow in aiki taiso training is to increase the repetitions of each exercise. After stretching, the aiki taiso usually take up 6-7 minutes of a practice, assuming 4-5 repetitions of each exercise per side. I find that once or twice a week I like to up the repetitions of the aiki taiso to 10 per side so that they take roughly 12-14 minutes. I believe the added repetitions have several added benefits.

One benefit is simply that the increased repetitions allow beginners to find the right rhythm. So often when we do the aiki taiso, beginner and intermediate students' minds are filled with details of how to move the feet, hands and body so that just as they start to practice the exercise correctly, we switch off of it. By extending repetitions, these students get to have more repetitions of working in the proper rhythm and flow.

Moreover, all of us can benefit from greater repetitions. Before beginning the extended repetition version of the aiki taiso, remind the students to do their best to follow the rhythm of the leader and stay in sync with the leader and each other. With more repetitions, one has a greater opportunity to fall into the rhythm of the movement and find the proper flow of ki. Note that often when the class is fairly small, we will do this with a "silent count." When there is no overt counting, students must seek to extend their awareness to the flow of the movement to keep in sync. Likewise, the leader needs to find ways to keep the students in rhythm without relying on sound.

Increased repetitions also lead to greater efficiency. As one pivots over and over again, or goes up and down repeatedly, one will start to pare away excess movement and find the essence of the movement. This is particularly apparent when executing 20 repetitions of koho tento undo in a row, or of ushiro tekubi tori zenshin nage undo or kotai undo in a row. Indeed, an additional benefit of increased repetitions, especially on these three exercises, is that it will lead to the building of core strength. Critical to our posture and our core strength are strong leg muscles and abdominal muscles. These three exercises are very good at working those muscles and building a firm core.

Finally, let me encourage students to do this high rep version of the aiki taiso on their own each day. You'll find it is a nice workout that warms the body and settles one's energy in just 12-14 minutes. Try it and enjoy!



Technical Corner

Shomenuchi Ikkyo Irimi

Shomenuchi Ikkyo Irimi is one of the most difficult techniques to learn because its execution requires an excellent sense of timing, the ability to blend when forces are seemingly at odds, and the ability to cut down smoothly and irresistibly. There are numerous details involved in its execution, but one key is to understand how the art is applied in motion. The figures shown to the left were taken from a 1993 video of Kobayashi Sensei teaching in South Carolina. Each frame reflects a 1/10th second progression in the movement. Thus, these frames allow one to see how the movement operates in real time.

Notice in the top three frames how Sensei dips down as the attack is launched. In the next three frames, the initial contact is made and then nage rise back up as he turns his hips to the left and prepares to cut down. The cutting motion is primarily at the wrist, with the hand near the elbow following the motion down. Once a strong cut is achieved, the movement is completed by simply shifting forward and guiding uke to the ground.

In teaching this technique, Sensei started by executing the shomenuchi ikkyo undo exercise several times in rhythm, pausing at the top and then cutting down smoothly. Then he showed the technique several times, modeling the rhythm of the technique for us. After we practiced it a while, he provided some pointers and moved on to variations. Remember to practice the flow of this powerful technique with calmness.

Borrower

Tim Baker

Last week I found myself in Charlotte, NC, on business. I was going to be in town for the better part of the week, which meant I was going to miss both the Tuesday and Thursday classes at home (South Side Dojo, Michigan). I was planning to be out of town again on Sunday. So right before dinner on my first day I fired up my laptop and tapped into the hotel's free WiFi. A quick search and a few Google maps later I found two dojos not far from my hotel. Of course neither of them were Seidokan, but I didn't want to go an entire week without at least one planned ukemi. I whipped out my cell phone and placed a couple of calls that dumped me into voice mails.

A while later I was strolling down some random Charlotte street when my cell rang. It was one of the aikido instructors returning my call. We talked a minute and I told him that I'm an aikidoka visiting from Michigan and asked if he would mind me dropping in on his class the following evening. He assured me I would be much welcomed...as long as I remembered my \$10 mat fee.

The following day I skated out of my meeting at 5:30. A quick trip to my room to change out of my necktie and slacks and grab my gi and I was out the door. Google said the place was about a mile and a half up the road and around the bend, and even though I was about as familiar with Charlotte streets as Mark Foley is with self-control, I figured I would hike it.

The dojo was tucked away, seated at the rear of a rectangular building facing a storage facility and totally invisible from the street. By the time I stopped circling the neighborhood trying to find an entrance and actually made it inside the dojo, the class was dressed and stretching on the mat. The instructor came out and greeted me, produced a waiver and pointed me to the dressing room.

I made it to the mat as they were beginning neck stretches, wearing my white belt out of respect for their dojo. The class was just starting. Even though I didn't realize it at the time, I was about to learn a lot about myself and my aikido. One of the things I was about to learn was that I am a Borrower.

Among the first techniques we practiced was munetsuki kotegaeshi. I was partnered with a rokyu student and I assumed the role of uke first. His blend with my attack entered deeply, so deeply in fact that he and I ended up facing the same direction just as Sensei had instructed. His hara drop guided my captured arm almost to the surface of the mat before he opened his hip and whipped my arm over to effect my fall. His movements were much bigger and stronger than I was used to.

At some point during my turn as nage I realized what I was doing. I was doing it wrong. Or at least, I wasn't doing it the way Sensei had instructed. When the punch came toward me, I got off the line and when I blended, I didn't move quite as deep, yet I felt uke lurch forward, struggling for a little more balance. My hara drop was crisp, but nowhere close to the mat. An when I opened my hip, I guided uke gently down instead of sending him flying over

his shoulder. All the while, I heard Bronson Sensei in my head, admonishing to use both sides of my body. I had failed.

I tried harder next time.

What I learned during that class was probably the most significant thing I've learned since my last test. I learned that I'm a borrower. In *Beyond the Known*, Tri Thong Dang wrote, "We need to bear in mind that the techniques which we acquire as students during the periods of training are only basic information that we receive on loan from the teacher. They are borrowed techniques, not our own." (p. 42). That night as I walked back to my hotel in the crisp Charlotte night air, I reflected on the class and my mini-revelation. I have no strengths in Aikido because I have no technique yet. What I have are imitations of techniques, nothing more than the footprint stickers laid out on ballroom dance floors. And what are those steps without the rhythm and the style?

The Seidokan website's home page says, "While Kobayashi Sensei encouraged his students to discover an aikido which is truly their own, he nevertheless stressed the importance of doing away with the extraneous and focusing on that which works." (<http://www.seidokan.org/>) Similarly, Dang wrote, "But borrowing from others is acceptable only to a certain point. After we have attained a level of proficiency, we must eschew imitation." (p. 43). Currently, I have techniques I have borrowed, techniques I have yet to learn how to use consistently, techniques without rhythm and style, techniques I do not own. I am a borrower.

I studied with the Aikido of Charlotte guys for about three hours that night (two classes). As a ranked member of our organization, I felt it was my responsibility to represent myself, our dojo, our Sensei and aikido well during my visit. I think I accomplished that. Even though I realized that I owned nothing, I thoroughly enjoyed myself and the guys who accepted me on their mat that night. I know I have a long way to go and a lot to learn before I have earned any of the things I'm currently borrowing, but I look forward to the journey.

Reference

Dang, T. T. (1993). *Beyond the Known*. Boston, MA: Charles E Tuttle Publishing Co. Inc.

Training After Understanding

悟後の修行
GOGO NO SHUGYO

Taken from a 1970's handout by Roderick Kobayashi Sensei

The Seidokan Communicator is a newsletter forum for communication within Seidokan Aikido. If you have something you would like to share, email your article to Doug Wedell, Editor, at Wedell@sc.edu. We rely on your submissions!

Promotions

Godan

Janean Crapo 01/07/07
Aikido Institute of Michigan, Seiwa Dojo

Yondan

Charlie Caldwell 01/07/07
Aikido Institute of Michigan, Seiwa Dojo

Chaim Noy 05/01/07
Aikido Institute of America / Aikido Institute of Jerusalem

Sandan

Steve Vernon 08/20/06
Aikido Institute of America

Michiyo Kobayashi 10/08/06
Aikido Institute of America

Dan Hamilton 11/12/06
University of Texas Aikido Club

Nidan

Ben Doubleday 11/03/06
Aikido Institute of Michigan, Seiwa Dojo

Paul Janson 10/21/06
Aikido Institute of Michigan, Seiwa Dojo

Russ Robinson 05/06/07
Victory Dojo

Laszlo Vegvari 05/06/07
Aikido Institute of America/Seidokan Aikido So. Utah

Shodan

Yonatan Sagiv 09/30/06
Aikido Institute of Jerusalem

Anthony Dao 09/30/06
Aikido Institute of Michigan, Seiwa Dojo

Steve Bessony 10/10/06
Aikido Institute of Michigan, Seiwa Dojo

John Ferri 05/06/07
Victory Dojo

David Gibson 05/06/07
Aikido Institute of America/Seidokan Aikido So. Utah

Jim Conrad 05/06/07
Antelope Valley Seidokan Aikido

Clyde Morgan 05/29/07
Aikido Institute of Michigan, Seiwa Dojo

Congratulations!

Calendar

1. **Summer Camp: June 21-24, 2007.** Seidokan Summer Camp hosted by AIA and CSULB Aikido Club at Cal State University, Long Beach. Current registration rate is \$285 for Seidokan members for the whole weekend. Daily rates are also available. For more information please contact Mario at mario@fbharchitects.com (<mailto:mario@fbharchitects.com>) or Stephen at stevespargur@sbcglobal.net (<mailto:stevespargur@sbcglobal.net>) .
2. **September 7 - 9, 2007.** Jo Workshop at the Aikido Institute of America; For more information, please email info@aikidoinstitute.com (<mailto:info@aikidoinstitute.com>) .

Banyu Aigo

“Spirit of Loving Protection”

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