

The Seidokan Communicator

Aikido for a Modern Way of Life

Developing Centeredness

By Doug Wedell

Much of our Aikido training is dominated by a concern about technique. This is especially true for beginners, who experience the mysteries of shihonage or ushirokata hikiotoshi techniques as difficult exercises in coordinating complex movements of feet, hands, and body. Once we get a feel for the basic form of the technique, it still takes years and years of training to master it. Why? I believe it is because aligning the technique with the basic aikido principles requires the development of centeredness.

What is centeredness (besides a badly formed noun)? As with any of the deep principles of Aikido, we often know it more from its lack than its realization. When an attacker takes nage off balance, it is clear that nage has lost his or her center. On a more subtle level, anytime nage experiences collision or disconnectedness, there is a lack of centeredness. To be centered is to be at home with the universe, to be connected in a nurturing relationship with the surrounding energy, to be calm, relaxed, and positive.

Consider our simple ki test for keeping one-point. The examinee stands naturally while the examiner pushes lightly on the shoulder. If one is not centered, the force is received in the shoulder and tends to topple the balance of the examinee. After learning to keep one-point, the push is less disturbing and more reinforcing of balance. What exactly is going on?

When I was in Israel presenting the basic test for keeping one point, a visiting participant insisted that keeping one-point merely entailed getting a better grip on the mat or flooring with his toes. To disprove this, I had him jump up and down while I pushed. When centered, he kept his position, but when not

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centered, he was pushed back. His reaction was simply to shake his head and wonder.

Clearly there are limits to one's ability to keep balance under these testing conditions. If the examiner pushes hard, one must generally step back. However, there are sneaky ways around this. One way is to lightly touch the examiner's hip and let the energy be transferred back. This works because the ki is now in a circuit where greater force from the examiner is transferred back to the examiner and so equilibrium is achieved. This concept is illustrated quite dramatically when nage is seated seiza with several individuals lined up in front pushing as hard as they can and not being able to budge nage. Nage redirects the oncoming force so that it is nullified by lightly touching near the elbows. These examples lead to the conclusion that achieving equilibrium through the redistribution of energy or ki is critical for achieving centeredness.

How then do we train in order to develop centeredness? Naturally, there are several aspects to such training. First is simply the recognition of the loss of oneness. Remember, it does not really matter whether a technique results in uke falling. What matters in Aikido is whether nage has maintained calmness, centeredness, and harmony throughout while remaining safe. Thus, one must focus on the process rather than the product of the encounter.

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My Memories and Never Give Up

By John Fusch

After talking with Mrs. Kobayashi one day, she suggested I share my story with all of you. When I was 16 in 1967, my brother-in-law, a brown belt in karate, introduced me to Aikido. This was a grand turning point in my life. It was literally another world that opened up to me. My parents divorced and I moved to Los Angeles with my mom and sisters. We rented a few places about once per year, near my high school, Hamilton High. The one uplifting experience I had during that time was taking Billy Graham's personal commitment held at the Los Angeles Coliseum and walked towards Christ. That feeling waned over time and I felt generally alone until I formed a new family in Aikido.

Classes were located at the Los Angeles Aikikai on Venice Blvd. The Chief Instructor was Isao Takahashi, 5th degree black belt. He silently commanded instant respect and veneration. I studied hard taking classes for two or three nights per week for two hours a class. I walked to and from class from home, an apartment near Cheviot Hills. I'll never forget the glowing feeling I had walking home late at night carrying my rolled up sweat laden gi. I felt in the moment, like the cool night air was absorbing me.

William Ahana supervised me. Another black belt I remember from classes was our beloved Sensei Roderick Kobayashi. He stood out in class as a constant joyful whirlwind. His laughter infected the dojo and seemed to set the tone for the rest of us.

The dojo moved to another location nearby. One visitor I will never forget was Koichi Tohei who instructed our class. It was such an honor to be there with him. During practice, I felt fortunate to be his uke for at least one throw. Another fond memory was the time with Takahashi Sensei drove me home because it was raining. I noticed he wasn't wearing a seatbelt and when we came to a sudden stop, he said half jokingly, "I don't need a seatbelt since my Ki is extended while holding the steering wheel with both unbendable arms.

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And Never Give Up (Cont.)

I attained the rank of 3rd Kyu B, and then unfortunately, had to move to the San Fernando Valley, which disconnected my training. Life got in the way: College, Marriage, two kids and then a rediscovery. In the late 80's I found Kobayashi Sensei's dojo on Hyperion (in the Silver Lake District) and began anew with my two sons. We practiced for a while until I became 5th Kyu again, then, yes life got in the way again. Try remodeling a home during the recession and you will understand. I now have a new marriage, two new children and yes I have started Aikido again. I remember Kobayashi Sensei saying to me: "Well John, at least you keep coming back."

Arigato Gozaimashita Sensei. I'll bow to you Kobayashi Sensei for the rest of my life.

Aiki-Jogi Workshop 2003

By Gabriel LeGarreta

I attended the Aiki-Jogi workshop, at the Seidokan Aikido World Headquarters in Los Angeles, which took place September 5th through 7th, 2003. I am currently a white-belt at the Victory Dojo in Reseda, and this was my first time attending a workshop and the first time using a Jo. I didn't know what to expect going into the workshop. I brought my brother Steven Castorena along, since he was also interested in attending. Steve and I were only able to attend two of the three workshops offered that weekend, and there was a lot of information to absorb from the classes we did attend. During the course of the weekend, I experienced moods of awkwardness, feelings of clumsiness and in the end, a beginning of confidence and respect for the Jo.

The first evening of the workshop was lead by Joe Crotty Sensei and Larry Wadahara Sensei. The workshop began with the Aiki-Taiso and a brief introductory speech on the Jo. We also were taught some stretches and basic drills. I felt like I was managing well most of the time. The class was made up of mostly advanced belts so whenever we were paired off, I always found myself in the company of someone already knowledgeable with the Jo. This was like having a private tutor the whole night. Every partner I had that night was very patient with me, quick to correct my errors, and always offered words of encouragement. This was the first time I had used the Jo and things were going well most of the night for me until we began the Aiki-Jogi #2. Although each step was broken down and repeated many times, whenever steps were put together and a turn was involved, I would end up losing my focus and losing my place altogether. At the closing of the first night, Joe Crotty Sensei made it clear to us beginners that it was all right if we didn't learn all the steps to Aiki-Jogi #2. If we learned only the first few steps, it was at least a beginning.



My brother and I didn't attend the Saturday workshop, but we were both present Sunday. My Sensei, Sal Hernandez, must have noticed my confused state during the Aiki-Jogi #2 on Friday night, because during Saturday's regular class at Victory Dojo, he took the opportunity to show us Aiki-Jogi #1, which was to be covered on Sunday. Now with two sessions in two days and a head start on the Aiki-Jogi #1, I felt a little more confident on Sunday (this session was taught by Larry Wadahara Sensei) than I had when I started Friday's workshop. Sure, I made my share of mistakes during the course of Sunday's workshop, but once again the workshop was made up of mostly advanced students, so I was given the same patience, the same helpfulness and the same kind of encouragement that I had received Friday night.

During Sunday's workshop, my brother and I were unaware that Mrs. Kobayashi was watching us and making notes on our progress. We had no idea we were being watched so closely until I spotted my other Sensei, Aurora Hernandez, talking with her off the mat during the first break. Mrs. Kobayashi was talking with Aurora Sensei about where my brother and I needed help with Aiki-Jogi #1. That was the first of two ways Mrs. Kobayashi would honor me that day. The second happened at the close of the workshop and when I was preparing to leave. Sal and Aurora Sensei's approached me and said that Mrs. Kobayashi had just requested that I write this article about my experience at the Aiki-Jogi workshop, because she wanted a white belt's perspective.

Overall, I enjoyed the whole experience of attending the workshop because I learned something new in Aikido. Although some of the material was difficult to digest, the patience and understanding of the other participants guided me through. My brother and I enjoyed the whole weekend so much that we look forward to participating in the next Aiki-Jogi workshop or any other future Aikido workshops.

Workshop Pictures.



Developing Centeredness *(continued)*

Now awareness alone does not necessarily lead to a solution. Indeed, it can add problems because being aware of the lack of oneness can lead to the use of the judgmental mind. Instead, the key is to engage in blending actively any time disconnectedness is perceived and thus regain centeredness. This requires a meditative state of mind focused on harmony or blending. As a calm body requires a calm mind, we must start the training with proper attitude.

The development of a calm center is a lifetime training process. It is helped along through a proper training attitude on the mat. Below I list some ways we can integrate centeredness training into our everyday practice.

Aiki Taiso

The Aiki Taiso represent a set of exercises designed to develop and nurture proper ki flow and centering. Too often students and instructors rush through these or execute them in a distracted manner. I often remind students just before we begin the aiki taiso that they need to concentrate on dochu no sei (calmness in action) while doing the exercises. This is done through quieting the mind, lengthening the breath, and making smooth transitions. Viewed in this way, the aiki taiso are not mere warm-up exercises but rather they are designed to put us in the right mental, physical, and spiritual framework for the rest of the class.

Kokyudosa

This is a good exercise for developing a stable and calm center. Often students view kokyudosa as a contest. This type of oppositional thinking leads to separation and a focus on technique. Kokyudosa is a great example of how the attitude of oneness produces masa katsu a gatsu (True victory – Self Victory). A key aspect to training in Kokyudosa is to discard the goal of toppling uke and instead focus on the goals of achieving oneness and free movement. These in turn lead to and reflect centeredness.

Continuous Flow Practice

Our analytical minds are a great gift to us for they allow us insights into how the world works, which actions lead to good outcomes and which to bad outcomes. Despite the utility of analysis, a careful analysis leads to the basic conclusion that one must throw out the analytical mind to achieve oneness. Analysis is all about breaking things down into their constituent parts. The ideal of oneness requires synthetic thinking that unites rather than takes apart. We must examine our training time to find a good balance. I try to devote at least some portion of each practice to continuous flow practice, whereby uke and nage engage in the flow of the movement without analysis, breaking down into components, or deliberate stopping.

Centering Exercises Within Practice

Often we develop an ordinary consciousness mindset during practice and we fail to really perceive and learn because our mind is not open to flow of what is going on. When I see this happening, I try and change the consciousness level of the room by engaging in different types of exercises. Sometimes, we breathe together and then move into continuous flow mode. Other times we may do what I call leading-following exercises in which each partner simply follows the others movements, extending our awareness of the flow. I believe a key role of the instructor is to raise the consciousness of the group to focus on centering while training.

Right Attitude

Proper training begins with developing the right attitude. We learn little when we are focused on the negative or when we seek separation rather than oneness. This is a lifetime training activity, especially in that we should engage in the right attitude at all times, not just when we are on the mat. Our training time on the mat hopefully contributes to the development of centeredness and right attitude within our daily lives.

Concluding Comments

Years ago when I asked Kobayashi Sensei what was distinctive about training in Seidokan Aikido, he said without hesitation that it was the concept of balanced training. We need to examine our Aikido training from many perspectives and look to develop methods that enhance our progress along the path of life. If we view Aikido strictly from a martial perspective, we may fail to develop centeredness in daily life. If we look at Aikido as simply a feel good experience, we may not keep our center under duress. If we seek a single solution to an attack situation, we will ultimately fail because flexibility of mind, body and spirit are all necessary to developing centeredness. The good news is that we have natural diversity in each other so that we can learn from one another and experience the infinite variations of Aiki.

Aiki Within

Caught between the moment and eternity
I touch the harmony of infinity
Then drift back into the ordinary,
Where foot touches earth
And wind touches air,
And I revel in the details
Of the everyday.

The moment of attack,
Sharp as a sword blade,
Directs me back into the spaces
Between the lines,
The absence of time,
As waveforms engulf
And obscure
The distinction between
Here and there,
And the consciousness of
The everyday.

Then "I" return again to the ordinary
Back from between the moment and eternity
Back from the oneness within the chaos
The infinite within the nothingness
And I smile at this extraordinary gift
Bestowed to us
Within the everyday.

-Doug Wedell

Understanding the Attacker's Mind

By Doug Wedell

As we focus on self-defense in Aikido, we often neglect to develop an understanding of the attacker's mind. However, the development of our self-defense skills hinges on understanding the attacker's mind and being exposed to sincere attacks. This aspect of our training can be developed in various ways, which include training with weapons, training with sophisticated combination attacks and training in free attack situations. In this article, I catalog different types of attacks with the idea that none of these should be neglected in our training.

Displacement Attacks:

These are perhaps the simplest type of attack. You see them on the playground. An unhappy child pushes another child. Our pure versions of these include kataoshi, katakosaoshi, and ryokataoshi. The purpose of the attack is to move or displace the defender. The danger of the attack depends whether one is able to push the defender down or into something. The key to defense is to get off the line of force.

Immobilization Attacks:

These are another simple form of attack with the goal to prevent the defender from moving freely. In our Aikido lexicon, these attacks typically have the term tori added, as in Katatori, Ryotetori, Ushirotori, etc. In some circumstances, such an attack can be benign, as when a parent grasps a child to prevent the child from running into the street. A less benign motive is to hold the defender so another attacker can injure the defender, as in the ryokatatori attacks in randori. Immobilization is often linked with other attacks as described by four additional categories below.

Displacement and Immobilization Attacks.

One linkage of attacks is that of displacement and immobilization. In wrestling, one does not get points for simply displacing the other, but rather one must take them down and control. I do not see us practicing much of these types of attacks. One way to do so would be to follow the grasp with an attempt to drop the defender and control him or her (a classic takedown in wrestling or judo). Perhaps the best way to practice these is through our ushiro attacks. When one chokes from behind (ushiro tekubitori kubishime), one should attempt to displace the defender, usually by drawing back or over one's hip. Similarly, ushirotori should be followed by lifting and dropping the defender to the mat. When we practice under these circumstances, we realize that we must control our center and prevent the displacement from taking place. Thus, this is a more advance way to practice several seemingly pure immobilization techniques.

Percussive Attacks:

These striking attacks are aimed at doing damage to vital structures of the defender. These include our strikes, such as munetsuki and yokomenuchi, and kicks such as

maegeri and mawashi geri. With or without weapons, these attacks are aimed at causing broken bones, ruptured organs, concussions, etc. One must be sure to avoid the full impact of the blow or receive the blow in nonvital areas.

Immobilization and Percussive Attacks:

In this combination, the purpose of the initial grasp is simply to control the defender so a percussive attack can be administered. The classic attack here is katatori menuchi, where one holds the shoulder and then strikes the face. Any grasping attack can be interpreted in this way. By practicing this version of immobilization attacks, the defender realizes that it is critical to move to a safe place and avoid the dangerous follow-up attacks. Too often I see students practice arts for attacks such as katatetori oblivious to the idea that grasping of the wrist is a means to another attack rather than an end in itself. Such a frame of mind is problematic and leaves one open to serious injury.

Immobilization and Joint Twisting Attacks:

If attacked by a jujutsu practitioner, one would likely experience this type of combination attack. Rather than be content with simply immobilizing the defender, the attacker attempts to render the defender ineffective by twisting limbs to the point where they are damaged. Naturally, great care must be taken when examining these types of attacks. Once again, it is the secondary purpose of the initial immobilization attack to which one must attend and be sure one is not vulnerable.

Immobilization and Choking/Strangulation Attacks.

Again, if attacked by a jujutsu or judo practitioner, one would likely experience this combination. Choking (stopping the flow of oxygen) and strangulation (stopping the flow of blood to the brain) have the primary purpose of rendering the defender unconscious (and perhaps not revivable). When practicing defenses against chokes and strangles, the defender must make sure that a first priority is to avoid the full choke or strangle. It takes only a few seconds to lose consciousness and be rendered indefensible.

Puncturing Attacks.

A primary aim of several weapons attacks is to penetrate and puncture vital organs or arteries. The stabbing motions of the knife, sword and spear have this purpose. Naturally guns are used in this way. Getting off the line of attack is all-important here. However, failing to get completely off the line of attack, one must at least prioritize what is off the line of attack and protect vital organs.

Slicing Attacks.

Weapons with blades can be used this way. The slices are typically directed at arteries, muscles, ligaments and tendons. The knife and sword are primarily used in this

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Attacker's Mind (continued)

way. One needs to be aware of how to protect the most vital parts of one's body from the slice. Additional thought should also be given to protection of the limbs and hands. A well placed slice in these areas, while not immediately life-threatening, can seriously diminish your ability to defend.

Tactical Attacks.

Finally, the category of tactical attacks recognizes that the attacker may often have multiple goals and several means to achieve these. For example, in randori, the attackers may first try and corner one, then immobilize one, and finally dispatch one. In a one-on-one situation, the attacker may present many feints and misdirecting attacks in order to find an opening. Defense against these types of attacks is of course primarily for advanced students who have developed a good repertoire of defensive techniques. It requires a calm and flexible mind. The typical consequence is that one learns to recognize the limits of what one can do.

In summary, my aim in cataloging attacks is to increase our awareness of the purposes and types of attacks. With increased awareness, we can then address issues related to defense. Our practice of Aikido occurs at many levels: mental, physical and spiritual. Our training should not be focused solely on developing our technical aptitude, but rather should have a primary aim of developing ourselves spiritually. However, I think one of O-sensei's great insights was that spiritual training must be carried out along with mental and physical training. If our self-defense techniques have gaping holes, then I would venture to assume that our spiritual and mental training likewise have similar holes. O-sensei placed the concept of makoto (truth, sincere, realism) at the heart of our training. Kobayashi Sensei chose makoto for our systems name (sei) to further emphasize its importance. Within this framework, our development within Aikido must be tempered by maintaining our ideals in the face of constraints placed on us by reality. One such reality is that a sincere attacker has many modes of attacks that pose a challenge for us to find harmonious solutions to.

Chan Sensei Workshop in Salt Lake City

By Audrey L. Nelson

On August 15th 2003 Ahsa Aikido presented a workshop entitled "Matsagatsu Agatsu" with Stewart Chan Sensei. Aikidoka traveled from all over the west to attend. We were honored to have in attendance Richard Harnack Sensei from Saint Louis who brought one of his senior students Earl Rogers. Miriam Gram from Moab also attended with one of her students. A plane delay caused Chan Sensei to arrive late, so Harnack Sensei began the workshop by teach ki development and extension exercises.

Weather was a chief concern because the workshop was held outside, beneath the beautiful rocky mountains of Salt Lake City. Summer temperatures had been above 100-degrees, but clouds rolled and created a balmy 80-degree overcast day. Though there were a few sprinkles Mother Nature was kind.

Saturday after noon Michael Miller tested for Sandan. Though the testing was difficult, he became the fifth Seidokan Sandan in Utah! Congratulation Mike! And congratulations to Jason Coskey for serving as Michael's Uke! It's too bad we don't issue rank for breakfalls! Many students from Petersen family dojo were also in attendance. Dale Petersen assisted Chan Sensei and Harnack Sensei with the testing. Mike and Kim Finnegan, and Susan Jones and Becky Rendell from Petersen family dojo, served as Uke. Also of great assistance was George Ishii from Los Angeles.

On Sunday Chan Sensei taught a series of techniques from Ushiro Hiji Tori. The students were seen flying around like airplanes as they extended forward to "help the uke fall." Chan Sensei also focused on techniques from Futari Ryotetori. Students practiced sitting down and "flushing the toilet." ;-) We use a lot of funky metaphors in Aikido but they keep us rolling, ha ha. :-) Thanks to all who made this workshop so fun for all of us here in Utah. A special thank you goes out to Angie Barker, and Geoff Squier who were largely responsible for making the workshop possible. They are looking forward to testing for the Shodan in 2005.



Stewart Chan Sensei in Utah.

PROMOTIONS

Sandan

Steven Snapp Still Point Aikido Center
1/17/03.
Michael Miller Ahsa Aikido
8/16/03

Nidan

Mark Thomas Aikido Institute of Mid America
4/3/03
Robert Ramsey Aikido Institute of Mid America
4/3/03
Earl Rogers, Jr. Aikido Institute of Mid America
8/16/03

Shodan

Frank Allen Still Point Aikido Center
3/14/03
Todd Traube Aikido Institute of Mid America
3/30/03

Congratulations!

CALENDAR

Friday, October 17, 2003: Mini-Workshop with Kawakami Sensei @ the Aikido Institute of America; Time: 7:00 - 9:19 p.m.; For more information, please email Aikitiger1@aol.com or call (323) 254-3372

Friday-Sunday, October 17-19, 2003: Aikido Institute of MidAmerica will sponsor a seminar featuring guest Instructor Doug Wedell, St. Louis Missouri. For more information, please email Richard Harnack at aikima@primary.net or call (314) 647-0903.

Friday & Saturday, November 28-29, 2003: Annual Thanksgiving Workshop @ the Aikido Institute of America: For more information, please email Aikitiger1@aol.com or call (323) 254-3372.

Wednesday, December 31, 2003 Annual Bokken Shugyo: @ the Aikido Institute of America; Time: 9:00 - 11:00 a.m. For more information, please email Aikitiger1@aol.com or call (323) 254-3372.

Saturday, January 3, 2004 Annual Misogi Barai/New Year's Practice: @ the Aikido Institute of America; Time: 7:00 - 10:00 a.m. For more information, please email Aikitiger1@aol.com or call (323) 254-3372.

Saturday, January 10th, 2004 Annual New Year's Potluck Party: @ the Aikido Institute of America; Time: 6:00 - 9:00 p.m. For more information, please email Aikitiger1@aol.com or call (323) 254-3372.



Above: Michael Miller testing; Below: Jogi Workshop.



Above: Chan Sensei Teaching / Below: Jogi Workshop

