

EDITION 15
SUMMER
2026

TAE JOURNAL

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF
TRADITIONAL AIKIDO EUROPE

FITNESS IN AIKIDO

**SHU HA RI: STRUCTURE, FREEDOM,
AND THE DIRECTION OF PRACTICE**

**AIKI EXPERIENCE:
APPLICATION IN SELF-EDUCATION
AND DAILY LIFE**

**PRE-SUBURI BODY USE
EXERCISE SEQUENCE**

**DOJO PORTRAIT:
BYAKUDO AIKIDO DOJO**



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富嶽三十六景

神奈川沖
浪裏

江戶 葛飾 富嶽 第一





**"Progress comes
to those who
train and train;
reliance on
secret
techniques will
get you
nowhere."**

— Morihei Ueshiba

The Great Wave off Kanagawa:
Kanagawa-oki Nami Ura
(lit. 'Under the Wave off
Kanagawa') is a woodblock print
by the Japanese artist Hokusai
(1760–1849), created in late 1831
during the Edo period.

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EDITORIAL

BY AARON WIECLAWSKI



WELCOME TO THE 15TH EDITION OF THE TAE JOURNAL

Greetings to you all!

I am delighted to say that I have been asked to join the illustrious panel of aikido-philosophers that have been bringing a wealth of information for the last 14 editions and hope I can offer something, that they, and you, find beneficial in this and future articles...

Recently I have been (and still am) going through the old volumes of the Saito Sensei Traditional Aikido series, and I find that they continue to offer new ideas and insights.

It has made me consider my (nearly) 20 years of training and study in Aikido, from a naive beginner with no previous ability, to a yudansha and regular instructor at our club in Lancaster, to a newly appointed editor in this TAE publication. Coincidentally, this month's journal follows a similar journey from its authors:

Shadi Vossough from West Cumbria Aikido, a first time contributor for the journal, delivers an interesting perspective from a dedicated 6th kyu in the attitude of 'Shoshin' or 'Beginners mind' after attending the incredible UK Intensive in Kidderminster in early 2026, and gives us her experience training under Tomas Nord, Paul Keesen, and Brendon Buchanan.

Michael Ormerod explores and explains the Japanese concept of 'Shu Ha Ri' and the delicate shift between the various states of accepting form and later transcending it, while Andrea Pfisterer looks at the fitness benefits and impacts on healthy aging that Aikido offers, and gives you some ideas on how to progress and measure your training, as well as how to improve your cardio-respiratory system to enable you to train for many years to come, building a fit, resilient, aiki-body.

And to finish, we have more Q and A from our Chief Technical Director, Sensei Lewis, deep-diving into some more burning questions, to help on our journey as we walk the Aiki path together.

Aaron



ABOUT TRADITIONAL AIKIDO EUROPE

TAE or Traditional Aikido Europe is a group of European Aikido dojos with the purpose of training O-Sensei Morihei Ueshiba's Aikido as taught by the late Morihiro Saito Sensei.

We are currently about 400 active Aikidoka from 29 dojos in 7 countries. For more information, visit our website and make sure to subscribe to our YouTube Channel:

Online:

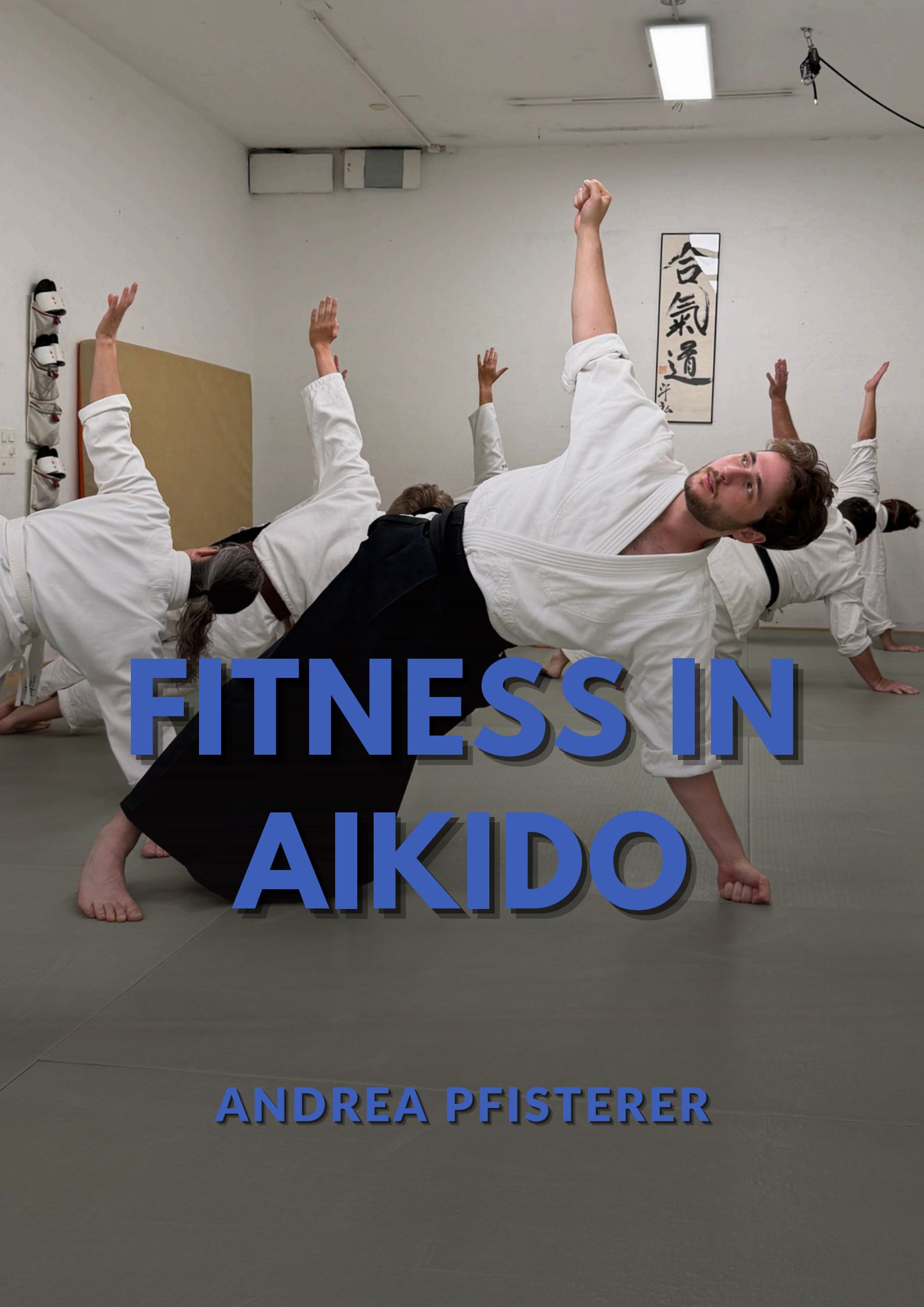


YouTube:



Contact:





FITNESS IN AIKIDO

ANDREA PFISTERER

The motivation to join an aikido dojo may be manyfold and will include such things as training for discipline, self confidence, self knowledge, conflict-management skills, and most certainly, also mental and physical health and fitness in the wider sense. When aikido was developed, contemporary life was mostly much more 'physical' – much more walking, carrying, manual labour and less sitting – and hence the 'baseline' fitness was probably much higher than ours. We need to compensate for many aspects of our mostly sedentary modern day life by 'exercising' to support our training. Which if we want to be well rounded martial artists we must. But while certain aspects of fitness can indeed be covered by our training in the dojo, for others this will only be possible with additional efforts outside the dojo. Designing a supportive training regime is not straightforward and needs to be individualised to the needs of each person.

The first section of this article takes a closer look on the various fitness components and how they relate to each other. In the second part we look at the relative relevance of these components for aikido training and how they can be addressed within the training or improved with additional training individually.

The 10 Components of Fitness

Fitness refers to the state of physical and mental health and performance. Depending on the sources one turns to (more medical or more sports-oriented), fitness can be divided into 5, 7, 10 or even 13 components. This article focuses on the fitness components which are relevant in aikido training and in the context of self-defense; here we divided them into 10 components.

1) Cardiovascular Endurance: Ability of the heart, lungs and circulatory system to supply oxygen to the muscles during sustained physical activity. One of the most important components of fitness. A decrease in this element makes almost every task very difficult. Very poor cardiovascular endurance during intense activities can even cause cardiac arrest.

2) Strength / Power: Here we talk about Strength as the ability of whole muscle-tendon-bone-systems to generate force against resistance. Absence of this component leads to early degeneration of the body. Lack of musculoskeletal strength also exposes the body to high risk of injury while performing any task against resistance. Power refers to the combination of strength with speed and can be separated into Explosive Power (ability to exert maximum force in a short duration, such as jumping or throwing) and Elastic Power (ability to use the stretch-shortening cycle of muscles and tendons to generate force rapidly, such as in a karate punch or kick.)

3) Flexibility: Range of motion around a joint or series of joints. Influences the body's ability to move freely and perform various activities without strain or discomfort. Flexibility is necessary to prevent injuries. A stiff muscle is likely to tear if it has to go through its full range of motion. Since the lack of flexibility leads to injuries, it inevitably affects every other component of fitness.

4) Speed: Ability to minimise the time required to complete a specific movement or task. Influenced by the rate of fast muscle fibers, but also by technique.

5) Reaction Time: Time it takes the body to respond to a specific stimulus or action. Can be influenced by distractions and the number of choices. This plays a role in self-defence: rather have only a few responses drilled in than a big selection of fancy techniques, which inevitably would increase reaction time. Can be divided into Visual Reaction Time: Time it takes to respond to visual stimuli and Auditory Reaction Time: Time it takes to respond to sound stimuli.

6) Body Composition: Ratio of fat tissue to lean body mass (muscles, bones, organs). A man is considered to have an ideal body composition if no more than 15% of his body weight consists of body fat. A woman is considered to have an ideal body composition if no more than 20% of her body weight consists of body fat.

7) Balance: Ability to maintain the centre of gravity within the base of support and control the body's position during various activities with minimal postural correction.

8) Agility: Ability to change the direction of the body quickly, efficiently and effectively, while maintaining balance and control. Combines Reaction time, Speed and Technique.

9) Coordination: Ability to integrate different parts of the body smoothly and efficiently to perform a specific movement precisely. This includes the synchronisation of muscles, joints and sensory information from the nervous system.

10) Mental Strength: Plays a crucial role in the ability to persevere with demanding physical tasks. Includes: a) Focus: Concentrating on the task at hand and ignoring distractions. b) Resilience: Not letting setbacks get you down. c) Determination: The strong will to achieve your goals, even when obstacles stand in your way. d) Self-confidence: Believing in your own abilities and being able to perform under pressure.

How are these components addressed in aikido training and where do they need additional, individual efforts?

The illustration below visualises which components are included or even inherent in aikido training and which are only partly addressed. Purple circles indicate to which extent it is covered in aikido training. The larger the purple circle, the more extensively this component is covered in the training. The gap to the green circles indicates that it has to be addressed through additional, individual effort.

Cardiovascular Endurance: This is addressed with lots of ukemi (in the narrower sense of rolling) training. It can and should be enhanced with e.g. games or animal moves. But, seeing that most of us lead a sedentary life with little physical exercise during the largest parts of our days, cardiovascular endurance is often sorely lacking. It should therefore be addressed individually, mostly with additional training, e.g. swimming, cycling, running. It also needs to be addressed through proper nutrition: reducing input of calories, sugars, salt, increasing fruit and vegetables and quitting smoking.



Strength / Power: To perform aikido techniques, whole-body power is needed, using the ground through the center and the arms. This demands good alignment, but not so much physical power, as we practice converting the force of the opponent's attack and using the force of the ground against them. On the other hand, high strength and power is needed in ukes role: we need to be able to execute a full power attack in order to put pressure on nage. How to train this? Individually, we need to practice daily lots of suburi for body conditioning. Add to this horse stance, planks, push-ups, burpees. Separate attack training with a punch bag / maki wara can round off this solo practice.

In average aikido training we totally lack elastic power, as in most dojos we hardly ever explicitly focus on the stretch-shortening cycle of muscles and tendons to generate force rapidly. In consequence we perpetuate the image of weak, slow attacks, and nage is not put under enough pressure, thus getting a false sense of security.

Flexibility: This is included in regular training of aikido techniques, especially shoulder and wrist flexibility. Leg and hip flexibility need to be especially addressed and is important for good techniques. For injury prevention good warm-up routines with dynamic stretches plus after training long stretches should be executed individually. Teachers are there to make individual suggestions on how to improve certain inflexibilities. The other extreme, over-flexible joints can be a great danger in aikido training, so this needs to be addressed seriously. Strengthening the muscles that help stabilise the joints, e. g. with safe training with light-weight or resistance bands is essential. These persons should not stretch too much, as overstretched muscles can further destabilize the joints. Women should be especially aware that their flexibility fluctuates with their hormonal cycle.

Speed: As we always train safely and – up to a high level – usually also slowly, this is often a component underdeveloped. It can be trained by increasing the speed of attacks or doing multiple attack drills where tori just evades and tries not to get hit. This kind of training simultaneously also improves reaction time and mental strength.

Reaction Time: this is also underdeveloped in average aikido training. To improve it, games can be used. Examples: 1) For visual reaction: In pairs, one person uses a paw and holds it quickly at various heights and distances in front of the partner, the other tries to aim three quick punches. 2) For auditory reaction: In pairs, standing, a belt in front between the two. The teacher gives commands (head, knees, shoulder, back, etc), both need to tap their own respective body part. On 'go' both try to snatch the belt. Reaction speed: a fast attack needs fast proper reaction for timely kuzushi. Here, footwork speed needs to be improved. This can be addressed by tai sabaki polishing. Recovery speed: when a technique did not work or when you got hit, go for the next without mentally hanging on to the mistake. Since we normally train in such a way that no one gets hit, there is a risk that if one does get hit, they will freeze up instead of remaining functional. So here training at or above the individual limits can be beneficial.

Body composition: As mentioned above, this is a crucial component and affects almost all other fitness components. Aikido training might have a long-term positive influence on the body composition, in that the person now engages in regular physical activity, as well as an indirect influence, in that the person receives new motivation to lose weight. Yet, there are good workouts that address this component much more effectively than aikido training, such as HIIT (High-intensity Interval training), hill sprints, swimming. In any case, a regular warm-up that includes skipping rope is beneficial for the entire training group.

Balance: This is improved 'automatically' with regular training: we constantly train losing and regaining balance when training with a partner, and weapons training is a great way to improve our proprioception. Here are some examples on how balance can be further improved. Be creative and find your own games and routines:

- performing shomen strikes (with or without bokken with a giant step, landing on one foot
- including balance cushions in suburi training
- slow kick training with long intervals standing on one foot

- performing challenging moves blind-folded
- Core strength is essential: include single leg exercises and outdoor weapons training on uneven surfaces.

In these exercises, the difficulty can be increased step-by-step: For example start on one leg on the floor, then move onto the balance cushion, then close your eyes, or include movement of the head.

Agility: see Speed

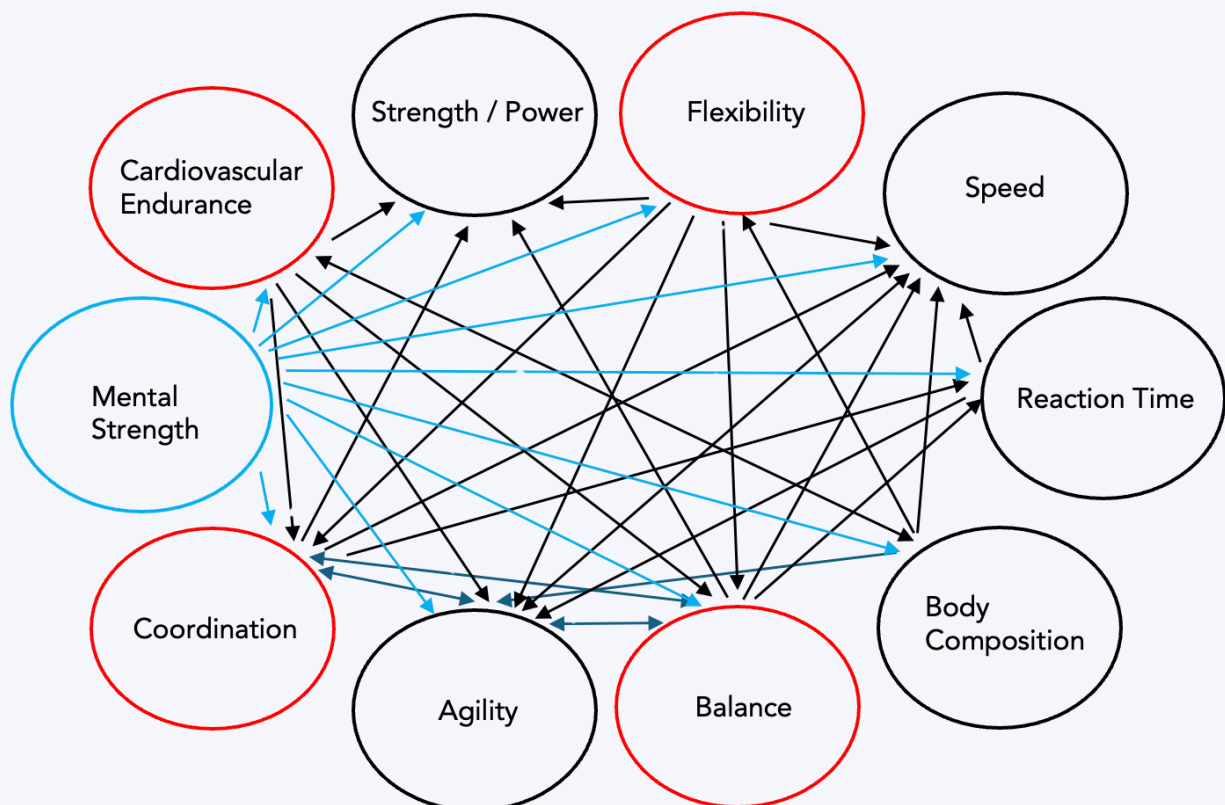
Coordination: This is probably one of the main areas of aikido training. Martial arts in general demand precise coordination between the eyes, hands, feet, and brain. It is improved by slow, attentive performance and drills (kata). Partner forms improve motor skills by syncing movements with timing and rhythm. If you want to further improve coordination by individual learning (e.g. in preparation for the next test): Use visualization techniques to mentally rehearse techniques and visualizing execution with precision and speed. This can enhance motor learning and improve your performance in the actual practice.

Mental Strength: This is an essential asset to even start with martial arts training. Who doesn't have it, will quit probably rather sooner than later! And in turn it is definitely improved over the training years.

The structured environment of learning techniques step-by-step with deliberate practice, the progression through the ranks, requires dedication and consistent effort. This cultivates mental focus and the patience needed to achieve the next goal. Training often involves overcoming physical challenges, enduring fatigue, recovering from setbacks (failing a test or even getting injured), or facing fears head-on and developing calmness in conflict situations. See also what was written on Focus (see article by Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros on Zanshin in TAE Journal 14).

Mental strength can further be specifically challenged by the teacher by incorporating distractions such as noise, objects etc. Being able to perform under pressure, thereby increasing one's self-confidence, can only be trained if proper pressure is executed. This is the role of sempai to give the right amount of pressure to kohai for them to improve. (see Strength for effective attacks).

The following illustration shows how the different components influence each other. Components which influence five or more other components are in red circles, as they are more crucial for overall fitness. Note that mental strength affects all other components.



So this is all very nice, but does it help us anything?

It can help us as aikido students – and this includes teachers – to analyze which components we ourselves are missing in our own fitness and should be improving and then target these components specifically. The best techniques and coordination helps us little, if we are lacking cardiovascular endurance or flexibility. Or if our partner is not impressed by our attacks, maybe we should work on strength or speed. Or if we have difficulties bending our knees, absorbing a nikkyo or staying connected with nage in ikkyo ura, then we definitely should work on our knee, hand and hip flexibility.

And it can help the teachers to re-evaluate their training plans and check which components they might have left out and think of some ways to include them. Also, to identify weaknesses in their students, encourage them to work independently on their weak points, and give them suggestions for improvement. Designing a supportive training regime for our martial arts is not straight forward and needs to be individualised to the needs of the person. Long-term goals should be planned with measurable, shorter-term targets.

Do I need additional fitness training besides the four hours of aikido training per week?

If you are a professional sports person or sports teacher, probably not. But for everyone else: yes definitely! Swimming, jogging or vigorous cycling twice a week plus a regular strengthening and stretching routine twice a week would be ideal to improve your overall fitness, improve your aikido, make you a better uke, and most importantly prevent injuries. Choose a routine that can be easily included into your week and an activity that appeals to you, because it should also be fun! In order to establish a fitness training in the long term, it must be chosen in such a way that it can outsmart your inner couch potato, who just wants to lie around*. The goal of every aikidoka should be to optimise their fitness in the service of aikido, in the service of the dojo group and in the service of their own lifelong health.

*Or if you do lie around, at least read Lewis's Review in TAE Journal 6, on 'Exercised', by Daniel Lieberman!



Fitness Test - Possibilities to measure and compare the various fitness components:

by Aaron Wieclawski and Andrea Pfisterer

1) Cardiovascular Endurance

2) Strength / Power

3) Flexibility

4) Speed

5) Reaction Time

6) Body Composition

7) Balance

8) Agility

9) Coordination

10) Mental Strength

1) Cardiovascular Endurance

Cooper test: This is a simple way to assess your VO2 max (Maximal oxygen uptake). VO2max is considered the best way to measure cardio fitness.

nrpt.co.uk/training/tests/running/cooper.htm

2) Strength / Power

Muscular endurance:

Muscular endurance

- abdominal muscles: max. number of Sit-ups within 1 min. (Legs at 90° angle, Hands on thighs)
- upper extremities: max. number of Push-ups within 1 min
- Upper extremities: max. number of Push-ups within 1 min

Muscular strength:

- Forearm: Handgrip-Test: using a handheld dynamometer for the most accurate result. For a less hi-tech option, you can 'deadhang' from a pull up bar and see how long you can last.
- 1RM or 10RM barbell squat/deadlift - See what weight you can lift in either a squat or deadlift using a bar for a maximum number of repetitions which should cause fatigue, i.e. it is too heavy to lift any more times. As you get stronger the muscles adapt to load, and you may need to increase the weight to achieve muscle fatigue. For training IMPORTANT: Ensure correct form when lifting heavy and build gradually. Do not lift too heavy too soon or you could injure yourself. RM (RM = rep max i.e. the maximum number of repetition at a set weight)

a) Explosive Power:

- Countermovement Jump. This measures the lower body's vertical explosive power:

<https://youtu.be/f5l7wEOORRQ?si=QubcpERckFx05wEs>

- Standing long jump. This measures the lower body's horizontal explosive power:

<https://youtu.be/l-BHIQy1DEK?si=AdkE0UOI06tBB3Wm>

3) Flexibility

Hands to floor with straight legs (this measures hamstring flexibility, hip flexibility, and low back range of movement).

Knee to wall (measures calf/ achilles tendon tightness): involves placing your toes against a wall and then your knee against the wall, your calf tightness is measured by how far the toes can get away from the wall with a flat foot, while the knee can still touch the wall.

<https://youtu.be/ElrpduJn92Y?si=Z0O-7J-p3Byi9wcF>

Thomas test (measures hip flexor tightness): lie on your back on a table or bed with one leg resting flat and then pull your opposite leg up to your chest. The measurement comes from beneath the straighter leg as it may have raised off the table. The hip flexor tightness is measured by the distance from the bed to a fixed point on the corresponding limb e.g. crease of knee to the bed, 6 inches.

<https://youtu.be/NMDd-4NspHs?si=KkOO5oa9zKzGMOD0>

Beighton test: used to assess for joint laxity and hypermobility conditions such as Ehlers-Danlos syndrome (hEDS). Assessing Joint Hypermobility - The Ehlers Danlos Society

<https://share.google/GH1rkhhbW9cFoJ1NYf>

Comment: If you are hypermobile, do not overstretch the joints purposefully and be careful when receiving pins. Even if there is no pain, causing increased laxity to your joints can cause instability and problems in later life.

4) Speed

100m sprint: The 100m sprint is arguably the best way to measure a person's speed. This is largely because the distance ensures that you reach max running speed, whereas a shorter run may not permit for that.

5) Reaction time

Ruler drop; As a friend/training partner holds a ruler (or measured piece of card) at the top, the bottom end is left hanging slightly above your index finger and thumb that are poised either side. When they are ready, the person holding the ruler lets go, and you have to catch it as quickly as you can. It is not about predicting when it drops, but reacting when you see it fall and catching it between your fingers. The distance is measured and the reaction speed calculated.

<https://youtube.com/shorts/pb-Mh5mWxac?si=IOjcH9eFdIguR2bt>

Boxing light pads; There are lots of devices out now with light and music in which you have to touch or strike the indicated pad. The more this is practiced the quicker the reaction time becomes.

<https://youtube.com/shorts/NSCs9jGv8Q0?si=eOmOg8ICxeMWIays>

In Aikido training, we practice reaction time by building pressure as our attacker speeds up and adds more intensity. Our reaction speed creates the 'awase'.

6) Body composition

BMI. Body mass index is calculated by height and weight and determines if you are under weight (anorexic) at a normal/healthy weight or if you are overweight (obese). However, BMI does not account for muscle density which is denser than fat i.e. if you have an active individual that is pure muscle but is heavy, they may be determined as obese rather than muscular. There are lots of online BMI tools if you are interested.

<https://www.calculator.net/bmi-calculator.html>

Fat percentage: This can be measured with special equipment that identifies fat percentage. This differs greatly in men and women.

There is an excellent video from Jeff Nippard that shows the vast differences and gives some reassuring figures that you are probably in better shape than you realise.

<https://youtu.be/5K9QhkPww44?si=kaceMhV4GGeLNTMd>

7) Balance

Y balance test - The Y balance test is measured by standing on one leg and then reaching as far with the other leg as you can, to get the toes as far from your body as possible. This is repeated with a back left direction and a back right, making the 'Y' shape. Check this video for clarity.

https://youtu.be/qFVuS-P2FrI?si=_SfTjBqVS5NBaU7Z

For the measurement you can use this calculator:

<https://www.topendsports.com/testing/tests/balance-y.htm>

8) Agility

- Shark Skill Agility Test: 3x3 boxes of 30x30cm each. Hopping on one foot in designated pattern.

- Box shuttle for return to play: 4 coloured cones form a large square. Jog in centre, touch called-out cone and return to middle. Repeat for one minute, gradually speeding up.

9) Coordination

See: youtube.com/watch?v=73X-Rb0AKPQ

10) Mental Strength

There is no single test that fully captures mental strength. Below are questions to ponder honestly:

When uke resists unexpectedly, what is your first reaction?

- Curiosity
- Adjustment
- Frustration
- Anxiety

After being repeatedly thrown by a stronger practitioner, how motivated are you to train next session?

(1: Very unlikely - 5: Very likely)

During randori or fast-paced practice, which tends to break down first?

- Technique
- Breathing
- Focus
- Confidence
- Decision-making

After failing a grading or not performing as well as expected during an examination, how likely are you to return to training with a constructive mindset?

(1: Very unlikely; I would feel discouraged for a long time - 5: Very likely; I would view it primarily as feedback for improvement)

If an injury forced you to reduce or stop training for several weeks or months, how confident are you that you would remain committed to your long-term Aikido development?

(1: Not confident at all - 5: Very confident)

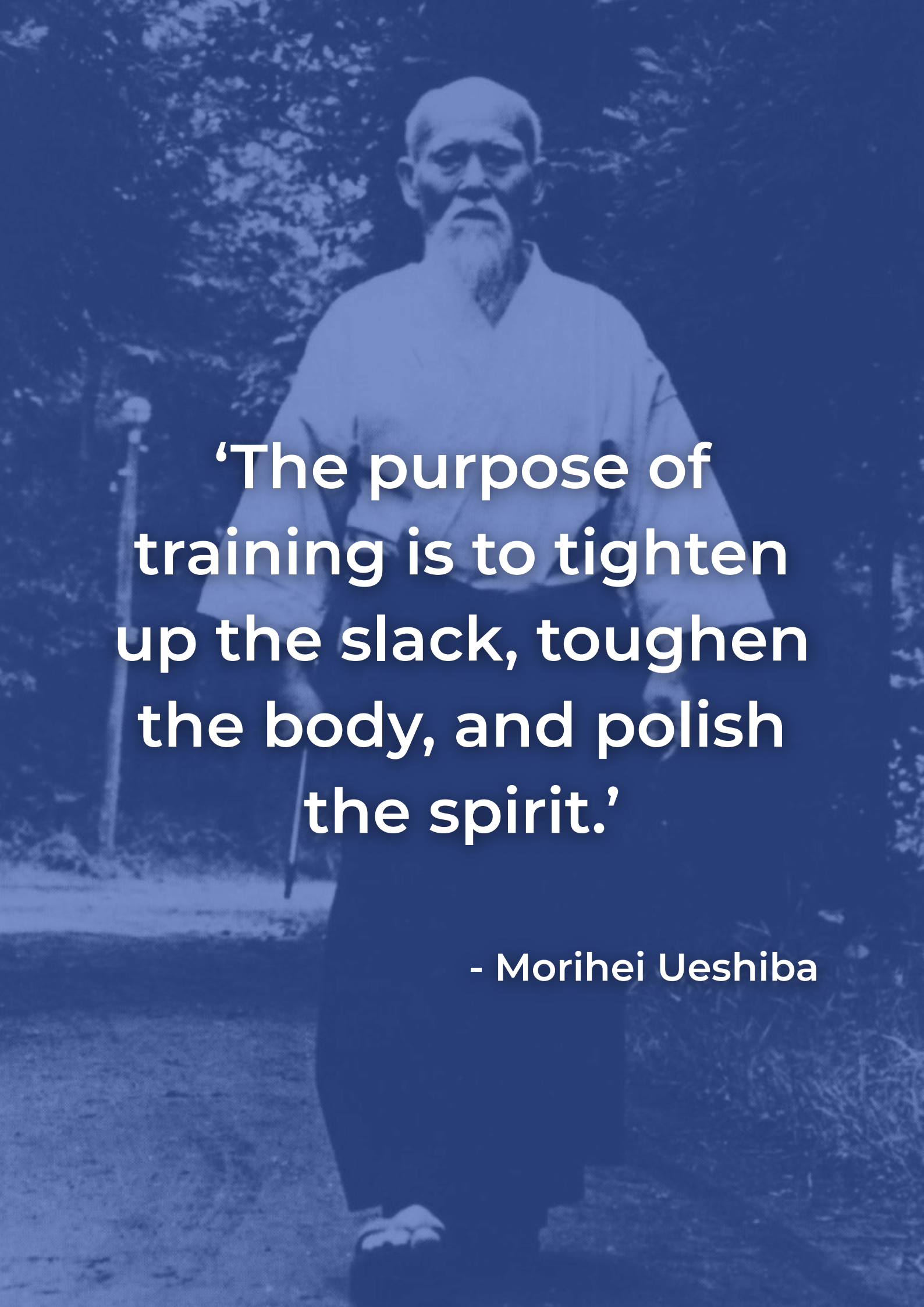


DOWNLOAD

Fitness Testing Record Sheet

A downloadable record sheet to help you design your own fitness regime:

[VIEW HERE](#)



**‘The purpose of
training is to tighten
up the slack, toughen
the body, and polish
the spirit.’**

- Morihei Ueshiba

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a white martial arts gi, is captured in a side profile, focused on her practice. She is holding a wooden staff (Jo) with both hands, positioned horizontally in front of her. She is barefoot and standing on a green mat with yellow and blue lines. In the background, other people in white gis are visible, slightly out of focus, suggesting a dojo or training hall setting.

MIDLANDS UK RESIDENTIAL INTENSIVE

**23-26 JANUARY 2026:
A BEGINNER'S VIEW**

SHADI VOSSOUGH

Introduction: The Seminar

The Midlands Intensive is a seminar in the UK running over 4 days from Friday afternoon to Monday mid-day, usually in January or February. It is somewhat inspired by the TAE summer camp and provides an opportunity to fully immerse in the training experience. The seminar offers multiple instructors, who join the classes when they are not teaching. In January 2026, out of 22 participants, only 5 were kyu grades, most of whom already had a substantial amount of training experience. The teachers were Tomas Nord, Paul Keesen, and Brendon Buchanan. The theme of the seminar was 'Reading Intentions'. The Saturday and Sunday involved 6 sessions of 1 hour to 1 hour 20 minutes, with 4 sessions on the Friday, and two full sessions on the Monday morning. We also had 20 minutes meditation each morning, 20 minutes of sensitivity (eg. contact, body integration, receptivity) exercises with Tomas at the end of the day's training, and we finished with a half an hour of stretching and 'warm-down' with Brendon, before we all travelled home.



A Beginner's View (Shadi Vossough)

I knew I wanted to attend this course as soon as I was told about it even though I had only been learning aikido for two months at the time. Perhaps naively, I thought I would be ready for it when the time came. The affection I feel from my club at West Cumbria and our sister club in Lancaster means I had no fear of spending a whole weekend with people whom I mostly had not met before. My concern was that I might not pick things up well enough to be a good uke and make the experience rich for everyone else on the mat.

As classes started and I drew away from the swirls of home life I came to see the focus of much of the teaching was driving movement from the hips and connecting with your partner: feeling them, moving with them and doing that with softness.

Peers commented many times on how well I was able to assimilate what was being described to me as 'high level' techniques. But to me it is all the same: lead the partner here, manipulate the body structure in that way... Either way I am searching the feeling in the body as to whether I am centred, whether I have my partner's centre. Getting to train with so many different people over a concentrated period gave me the chance to really tune into this, to work on details and to bring lots of things together. And then insights from different people presented more details to be worked on! I have learned so much from working with so many different bodies, so many different view points, so many different ways of expressing meaning.

Getting validation from teachers has been very gratifying and letting go of that, to train without ego has been very grounding.

I feel the change in my body after nearly 20 hours of training in one weekend. I've noticed the 'hook grip' of my third and fourth fingers, the stability through my legs and feet, my stance and ability to settle.

I felt quite at home in that room, on that mat, with those people. So much so I felt out of my element at my next club training session and couldn't get a grip, quite literally!

Aikido has landed in my life at a time when I am ready to meet the world with an open heart following a long period of isolation and turmoil. The aikido community have opened their big hearts to me and I am so grateful and so privileged.

This openness has meant, after seminar classes and open training had finished and we had shared meals I found myself laughing so hard while playing games with my aikido family during our downtime that straining an abdominal muscle felt like a real possibility (and I probably deafened those sitting next to me with my howls—sorry about that...)

Since I started my training in April 2025, the connections I have made and the awareness and grounding that has been growing came into focus during the intensive weekend. This gave rise to a feeling of true and absolute freedom and has facilitated a fundamental change in my life. One long overdue.



It might be difficult for people to understand why a junior would choose an intensive course for any reason other than ego. I realise what I have started is a life long pursuit, for me it's never going to get old. Another thing I'm grateful for. That said, I still find myself wanting to accelerate through these early stages, not to get to 'the end' or to be the best but to have enough techniques and movements embedded to reach the experimental stage, the playful places.



YUDANSHA 2025

A selection of quotes from TAE yudansha awardees in 2025



THERA HOPPE, NIDAN

"Aikido gives me guidelines in life"

When I get in conflict in my daily life I often try to compare the situation with an aikido technique/ exercise. I think you all know this:
Hmm; I'm out of balance, how can I get grounded again?
I feel stuck, where can I move freely?
I feel pushed, can I just step aside, or should I use the push to take control?



MALIK KREUTZFELDT, YONDAN

Aikido has given me roots, and made me restless at the same time — especially after passing my 4th dan. I love our art and all it offers deeply but I also believe that developing it further is both logical and essential. To me, that's how we honour our tradition and that's what I want to focus on.



BARBARA AMBRUS, GODAN

Aikido helps me especially coping with high-conflict situations, be it at work or in other situations.



PAUL MCGLONE, ROKUDAN

"Aikido gives me the opportunity to study the four aspects I concentrate on - Angle, Distance, Timing and Attitude"

SHU HA RI



**STRUCTURE, FREEDOM, AND
THE DIRECTION OF PRACTICE**

MICHAEL ORMEROD

Definitions

Before entering the main discussion, it may be helpful to offer a brief orientation to SHU HA RI, a classical model of learning found across budo, tea ceremony, poetry, calligraphy and other traditional Japanese arts. It is often presented as a three-stage ladder of transmission, and can be understood as a direction of travel in the learning process: a movement from form, through variation, to natural expression.

SHU HA RI / 守破離

SHU/ 守 lit. guard, protect, defend, obey

HA / 破 lit. rend, rip, tear, break, destroy, defeat, frustrate

RI / 離 lit. detach, separation, disjoin, digress

SHU preserves the form, HA explores within it, and RI transcends it. Each stage reshapes the practitioner's relationship to the art, their teacher, and to their own embodied understanding.

SHU HA RI: Irreversible Maturation

Misconceptions about SHU HA RI are common. It is sometimes described as a cycle, a wheel one endlessly returns to the beginning. But the metaphor fails. A mature practitioner cannot return to the innocence of the beginner. What can be cultivated is SHOSHIN - a training attitude that cultivates 'as-if for the first time' freshness - but it is not regression. It is clarity without the naivety of ignorance.

A more fitting analogy for SHU HA RI is the lifecycle of the chick. The eggshell is hard, constraining, and necessary. Within it, the chick grows safely, absorbing the 'yolk' that shapes and nourishes its early development. When it becomes strong enough, it presses outward, pecking at the brittle shell. Cracks appear. Eventually, with continuous sustained effort (and sometimes a little assistance), the chick breaks free. The most dangerous stage is the one that follows: learning to live, and ultimately to fly freely, in the open world.

The chick cannot go back. Nor can the practitioner who has internalized the art return to the simplicity of the SHU stage. It is not a cycle one returns to, but a path one grows through and into. SHU HA RI is irreversible maturation.

SHU: Embracing the Form

In SHU, the student begins by copying. Precisely tracing the lines. Repeating the forms until the ego dissolves into the rhythm of practice. The word we use for training: 'KEIKO' means literally to 'trace the old' - and can be related to the practice in Shodo of the student using thin rice paper to trace over a master's work, to replicate not only the form and flow of the work, but the very process of artistic creation itself.

In his seminal essay on SHU HA RI,* Yukiyoshi Takamura describes kata (or forms) as the educational core of a school - a vessel containing both the visible OMOTE and the hidden URA, form and principle. A childhood student of his grandfather and father, Yukiyoshi Takamura received Menkyo Kaiden in Shindo Yoshin-ryu at sixteen and later continued his training under Matsuhiko Namishiro. After moving to California in 1959 his teachings evolved into Takamura-ha Shindo Yoshin-ryu. He was known for his sharp insight into the essence of martial movement and for his insistence on clarity, integrity, and personal responsibility in training.

To 'embrace the kata' is to submit to its structure without negotiation. The early forms are intentionally repetitive, sometimes uncomfortable, designed to train concentration, timing, and the ability to maintain focus under stress. Basic training challenges the ego by demanding conformity rather than creativity. For the serious student at the SHU stage, distraction and boredom are constant companions.

This is not 'basic' in the sense of 'simple.' These are fundamentals - the building blocks upon which everything else rests. Walk before you run. Basic kihon training reinforces the logic of the system and refines the abilities of the student by shaping the body-mind through disciplined repetition.

Takamura warns that at this level, the forms can almost teach themselves - and this is precisely the danger. Poor instruction or inattentive correction can instill habits that later become obstacles to progress. The shell must be intact for the chick to grow safely within it. Diligent teaching is essential;

nothing is more foundational for effective transmission. In our western culture of individualism and conceptualisation prior to experience, many students never fully engage in this stage of learning. We come to the dojo with all our baggage, ideas, fantasies, and expectations - forgetting to drop them off in the changing room. The student-teacher relationship must be one based on trust, the 'sensei' as one who has 'lived before' must be acknowledged. Effort and restraint from both parties, egos aside.

HA: Divergence Within the Form

Once fundamentals are embodied, the practitioner enters HA, the stage of exploration. Here the kata reveals its deeper logic and the first glimpses of ura become intelligible - the hidden currents beneath the surface start to emerge. The student begins to sense the principles that animate the form. Our chick, now strong enough, expands into the shell, pressing into its once protective now restrictive boundaries, sensing the wider world beyond. Cracks begin to show.

Takamura describes HA as the "divergent form existing within the form" - the moment when training in advanced waza becomes legitimate and genuine skill begins to arise (usually around sandan/yondan). The student is encouraged to explore responses to failure within the forms, to test how principles behave under pressure and an adaptation of the basics to their individual characteristics. This is disciplined inquiry of the student, not simple rebellion.

The boundaries of the form remain essential. Too much freedom leads to sloppiness; too much restraint suffocates intuitive talent. The form must remain recognizable, its identity and logic intact, even as the student explores its elasticity. The pitfalls here are real. A student may mistake novelty for insight, or a teacher may encourage divergence before the underlying principles are stable, or not encourage enough when they are.

* SHU-HA-RI: THE TRADITIONAL JAPANESE METHOD OF KNOWLEDGE TRANSMISSION by Takamura Yuki Yoshi:
<https://www.kimusubaiikido.com/teaching-and-shu-ha-ri/>

Takamura warns that deviation from the school's core concepts at this stage can be disastrous - a premature crack in the shell that leaves the chick exposed before it can stand. The teacher's role here is essential, where students are seen to be caught in a dead end they must be nudged back onto the correct path. The teacher can suggest where to dig, but can't do the digging for them.

Yet when guided well, this stage is exhilarating. Progress comes in leaps. The student begins to appreciate the forms not as fixed sequences but as a living repository of the principles. The logic of the system becomes alive. The gap between practice and daily life begins to narrow.

RI: Transcendence and Re-membering

RI is the most elusive stage, and Takamura is clear: it cannot be taught directly. It is not an attainment but an emergence - the moment when the system has been so deeply internalised that its outer shell falls away. What remains is pure principle, expressed spontaneously and without conscious thought. Techniques may resemble familiar forms, or not - the elasticity explored in the HA stage taken to its limit, forms may even appear to break the rules.

This aligns with the deeper truth: RI is less about achieving something new and more about returning to something innate. Before you walked, you stood; before you stood, you crawled; before all of that you simply moved, the capacity was already encoded within you. RI is a re-membering - a stripping away of the superfluous until only naturalness remains. It's the part of the process most difficult to articulate and yet totally obvious to observe in the authenticity of a true master.

Takamura describes this stage as a kind of moving meditation, where perception and action arise together, without lag. To an observer, the practitioner appears almost prescient, but this is simply the absence of mental inertia. The techniques, logic and principles of the system intertwined and expressed - all at once, and none of them as concepts. It is the chick fully matured taking flight.



At this stage, the teacher-student relationship must evolve. The sensei becomes less manager and more mentor - present, supportive, but no longer directive. The student must honour the lineage; and the teacher must allow autonomy. Both must remember they are part of a larger picture, a long line of teacher-student transmission. It's not personal. In western art forms we talk about 'expressing oneself' - whereas in this sense, the idea is to 'paint oneself out of the picture'. The principles are no more trapped in the forms than they are the walls of the dojo, the gap between daily life and training being now paper thin.

Takemusu Aiki and the Pathless Path

Aikido's ideal of Takemusu Aiki - creation within and beyond method - sits at the heart of SHU HA RI. Form and formlessness, emptiness and fullness, the gate that opens by itself. The paradox is simple: structure is necessary for freedom, yet freedom cannot be imposed. The term itself points to this: TAKE, martial technique; MUSU, to be born or generated; AIKI, the harmonious, non-oppositional state of mind. Taken together, Takemusu Aiki refers to martial creativity arising spontaneously from a mind in harmony. It is the fruition of everything that SHU HA RI prepares us for.

The deeper aim is to understand the source from which techniques arise. From that place - the wellspring of principle - techniques are not chosen but birthed, unique and appropriate to the moment. This spontaneous responsiveness is considered the highest level of Aikido:

Takemusu Aiki. In this sense, the essence of Aikido is not technical. Techniques are the visible expression of something deeper. When understood through long practice, they point us back to what gives them life and meaning - their origin in principle, relationship, and mind.

Liberation cannot be handed down intact. You cannot outsource your realisation. Help accelerates the process, but there are no shortcuts. You must do the work - at your feet, in your body, in the present moment, right now.

Practice Notes and Closing Reflection

A Zen story advises the seeker to "swallow the whole fish, spit out the bones". This is SHU HA RI in another form:

- SHU: swallow the whole fish; accept the teaching fully, go all in.
- HA: spit out the bones; discern what serves you, set aside what doesn't.
- RI: digestion requires chewing and rest; work hard, allow understanding to settle.

In the training process be wary of what you discard. Discernment comes after immersion, not before. Keep everything until you truly understand it. Preferences are unreliable. Premature discrimination is the enemy of depth. The mind that discriminates too early becomes stuck.

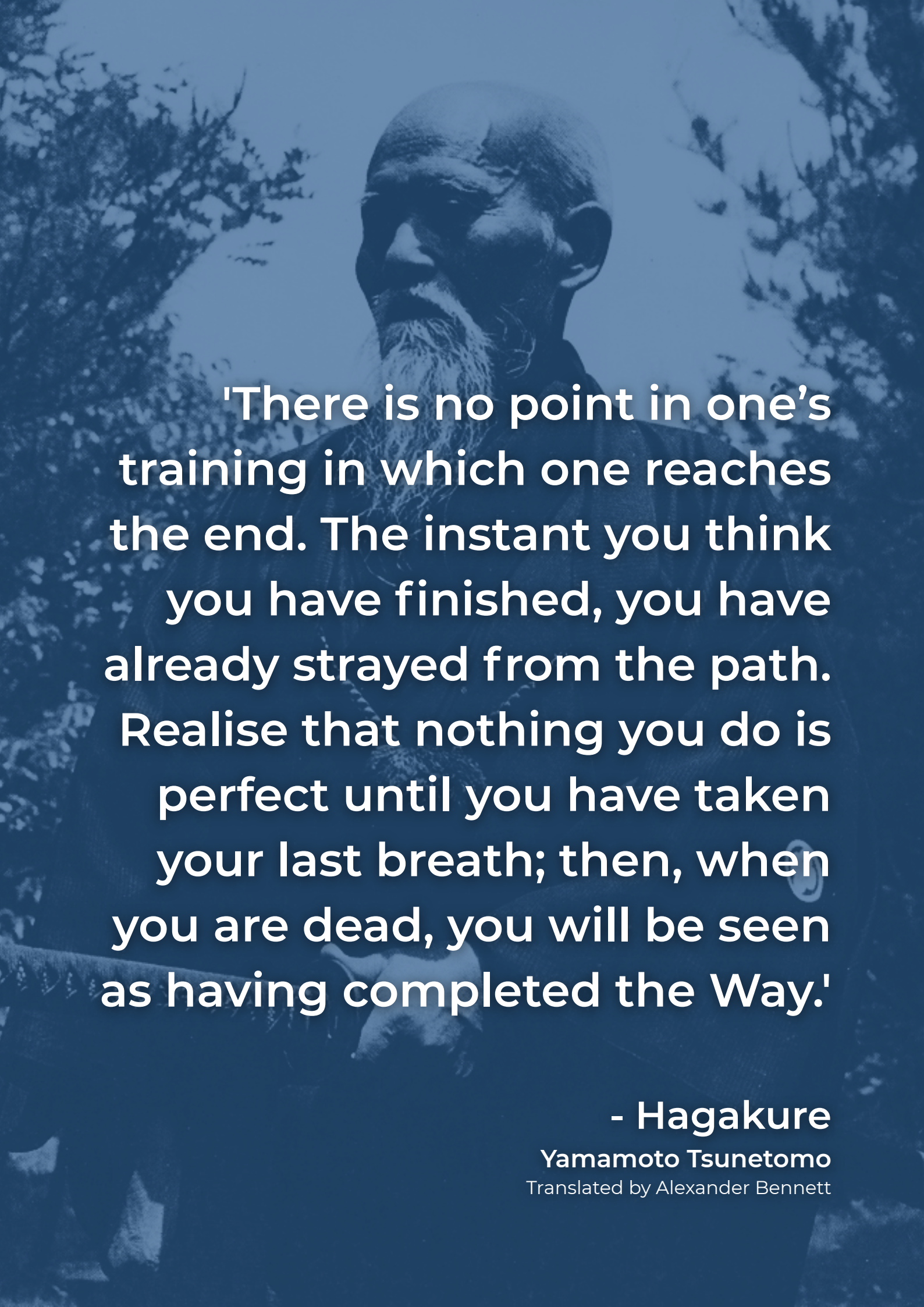
SHU HA RI is not a tidy ladder but a map of maturation. Begin by being shaped, then test and adapt, and finally let the form dissolve into principle. The chick cannot return to the egg. The mature practitioner cannot return to the innocence of the beginner. But what is possible, and necessary, is to train with an 'as-if for the first time' freshness - with an attitude of curiosity - while moving forward into the freedom that practice slowly, insistently, makes possible.

To finish, a wonderful quote from Katsushika Hokusai - from the point of view of a master of his craft looking back over his life's work, and who is clearly not yet finished:

*"From the age of 6 I had a mania for drawing the shapes of things. When I was 50 I had published a universe of designs. But all I have done before the age of 70 is not worth bothering with. At 73 years I was somewhat able to fathom the growth of plants and trees, and the structure of birds, animals, insects and fish. Thus when I reach 80 years, I hope to have made increasing progress, and at 90 to see further into the underlying principles of things. It is my greatest wish to reach 100, when my work would truly become marvelous. If I live to be 110, every dot and every stroke will be as though alive." ***



** Katsushika Hokusai in his postscript from One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji, published in 1834 (age 75)

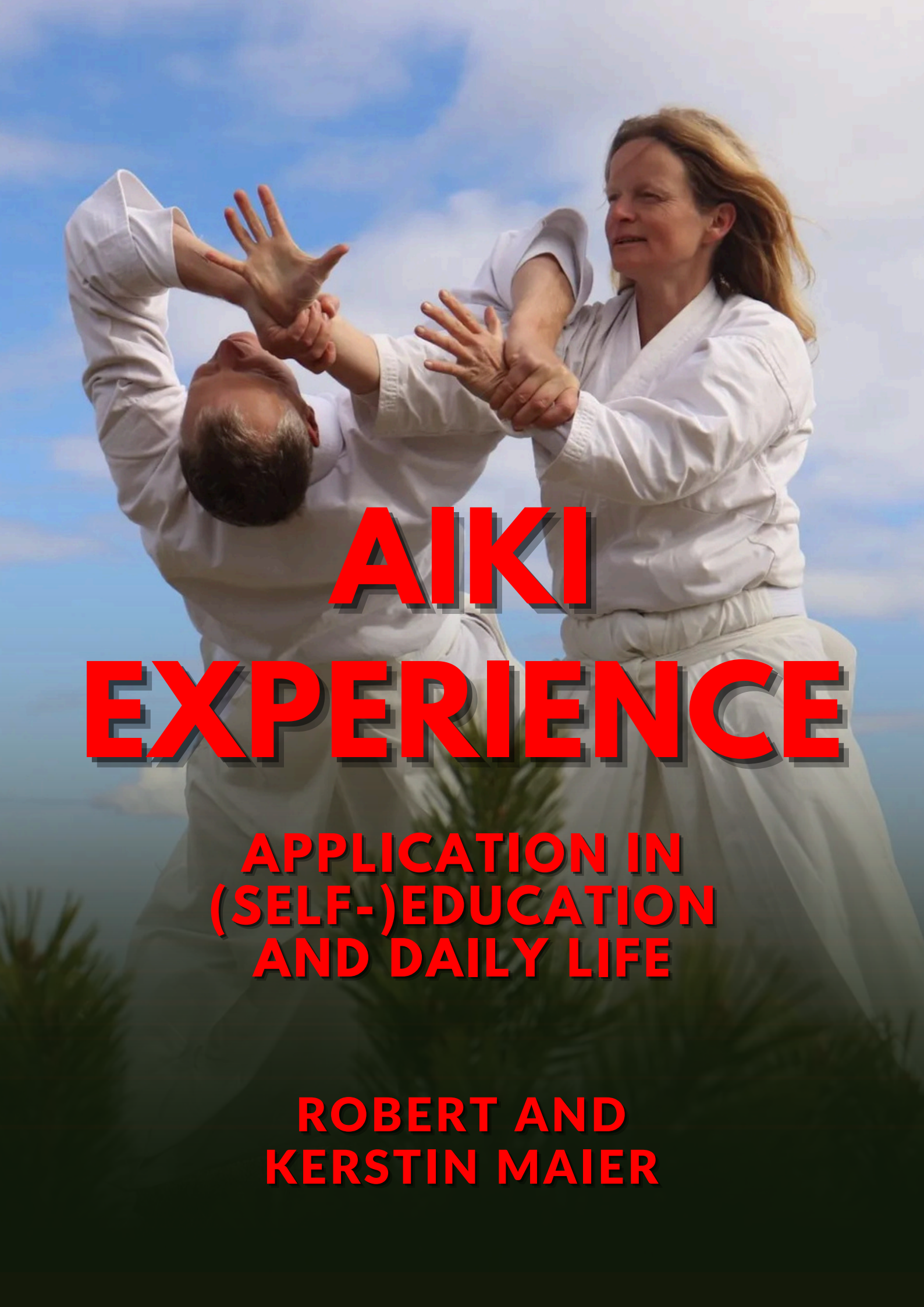


'There is no point in one's training in which one reaches the end. The instant you think you have finished, you have already strayed from the path. Realise that nothing you do is perfect until you have taken your last breath; then, when you are dead, you will be seen as having completed the Way.'

- Hagakure

Yamamoto Tsunetomo

Translated by Alexander Bennett

A man and a woman in white martial arts uniforms are practicing Aiki movements. The man is on the left, leaning back with his arms raised, and the woman is on the right, holding his arms. They are both looking towards the right. The background is a bright blue sky with some clouds.

AIKI EXPERIENCE

**APPLICATION IN
(SELF-)EDUCATION
AND DAILY LIFE**

**ROBERT AND
KERSTIN MAIER**

The Outer Path

The mayor of a small Bavarian village offered to build an Aikido school based on our design. He intended to do so on his personal initiative as an entrepreneur. A preliminary contract had to be signed beforehand. At the same time, Robert made the decision to become a professional Aikido teacher. This was back in 1995. The agreement with the mayor/entrepreneur implied two major challenges:

1. Develop a carrying program in teaching children of different ages.
2. Acquire a deeper knowledge of the Way of Aiki. We found both deeply related.

"Children classes are the bread and butter of a professional Aiki-Dojo!" This was the tenor of advice we had gathered from professionals like Pat Hendricks and other Iwama Sempai at that time. Just copying the way children were taught in Japan, e.g. in the Ibaraki Dojo, was no option for an Uchi Deshi who had experienced many of such 'little monster' classes, basically being adult classes for children. While examples found in Europe were better adapted for children, they were largely akin to sports classes and bore little resemblance to the "spirit of Aiki" that draws practitioners to this unique martial art.

So, what is so special and distinguishes Aikido even from other martial arts? Our conclusions: first, it is non-competitive, even non-comparative! Second, Aiki responds to the needs of an attacker or perpetrator, but does so by addressing their deeper, potentially unconscious roots. Third, it addresses the whole being - body, mind, soul and shadow, including the unconscious and trauma. From those aspects, a program was designed to teach children in three age groups: 4-6, 7-11, and 12-15 years old. For many years, up to 160 children were taught in the Aikido Zentrum Teising in ten parallel courses per week.

Over the years, we observed two clear trends: first, more and more children with difficulties were 'recommended' to our Aikido classes by professionals. Second, once a course was established, children tended to stay in Aikido for many years, resulting in 14-16 year-olds who already had nine or ten years of training behind them! And they all wanted to improve themselves, aiming for a higher school qualification or further education.

Young warrior Uchideshi

This led us to our next step: what if young people in difficult situations could immerse themselves in Aikido in a far more intensive way, such as in an Uchi Deshi-like context? So, in 2005, after 10 years, we closed our Aikido school, leased part of a former farm and built a new dojo to invite young people in difficulties to 'live Aikido' with us. With much more experience and knowledge, a program was designed to address both, the requirements of officials dealing with 'difficult youths' and the needs of their clientele. The archetype of a warrior became a driving momentum to our young participants. The twice-daily Aikido training, the particular way of life, and preparation for (higher-level) school exams all functioned well. However, especially for those affected by school trauma and thus unwilling to engage in conventional learning, it proved insufficient. What was lacking were opportunities to put newly acquired strengths and abilities into practice - a kind of reality check that could have served as a source of inner motivation. Since the land around the site was very limited, we decided, after a year and a half, to give up our newly built dojo to buy our own farm buildings in 2007. Over the following ten years we restored and fitted out the buildings and worked the land with up to eight 'special Uchi Deshi' at a time. Most of them stayed in our program between six and twelve months.



Special courses

Already in 2011, we also began developing a very special program for young people aged between 14 and 21 who had been convicted of particularly aggressive and violent attacks. Around that time, we learned about the book 'Takemusu Aikido' dictated by the founder, motivating us to embrace such new challenges. So far, everything in our Aikido life had been a home game. Since the 1990's, in addition to our Aikido School, we had been offering special courses in private and public schools, as well as in kindergartens. We had started with 'Social Learning through Aikido', then 'Violence Prevention through Aikido' and ended up running three-day outdoor team training courses with problematic high school classes. In this new program, however, we would be meeting eight violent youths who had been ordered by the judge to take part in our two-weekend 'Anti-Aggressivity Course' - otherwise they would have to go to prison. This course had to be highly adaptable, since everything was happening on a 20-square-metre tatami area, one of us being in the midst of these violent attackers, whilst the other was taking care of the situation from the sidelines as an observer. The challenge of this setting was teaching the essence of Aikido without getting too technical and simultaneously 'touching' each participant in a way that encourages them to change their reactions on 'provocations' in the future. This is what we continue to offer today, as the program is very successful: 96% of participants showed no violent behaviour over the following three years according to regular official evaluation by the Youth Court Service.

Our Uchi Deshi program was disrupted following the German refugee crisis in 2015, which had shifted the focus of public institutions to minor refugees and ended abruptly in the health crisis in 2020, when officials suspended almost all youth aid programs.

Almost! The Anti-Aggressivity-Courses turned out to provide our livelihood for the following three 'transitional' years. The judges did not stop the convictions, so our courses had to be offered under all circumstances, as the only alternative for the young convicts would otherwise have been imprisonment.

We stopped all other Aikido teaching. Restrictions like social distancing were not acceptable for us. In 2021, following the public program "Catching up after Corona", we took one major attempt to restart youth work in designing a project, called 'Joy for Learning through Joy of Life'. But for several reasons, the project came to an abrupt end as a result of COVID19 restrictions and their effects.

Next stop: Mountains

After this we made the definitive decision to move to the mountains with our three children aged 7, 10, and 14, and leave our fulfilled 'dream of life' behind. Various factors during the journey - lockdowns, border closings, children's opinion - brought us not to the Alps as originally considered, but to the Pyrenean mountains in southern France. Having no idea about how to make our living there, we bought a remote mountain farm on the Canigou massif, the holy mountain of the Catalan people.

If somebody is now asking themselves, "Do Kerstin and Robert have an inexhaustible source of money?" - yes, we do. But it is not our families. It is the banks! Almost everything we have is financed close to 100%. We are trustworthy social-business clients, and we also apply Aikido principles in our relationships with bankers. In the end, they are happy to have the opportunity to contribute to spreading Aiki throughout the world. What you can do with violent people, you can also do with business bankers. Thanks to Aikido.





In 2023, after three years of inner focus and attunement to the change of paradigms, we designed the "Yamabushido" program as "Travel Program for Inner and Outer Journeys" for the most challenging young people in need of intensive one-to-one educational support. Since then, one may call us 'Yamabushi' - "the people who routinely sleep on the mountains". We make the farm territory re-accessible; recultivate the old stone terraces; plant trees; protect sources and restore the old pathways, shelters and huts in the abandoned high mountain region. Our Aiki experience provides the space for all of this and for our new "life in paradise", as our children like to call it.

Still, it is hard work every day and we can now understand why 'rural Aikido' like Iwama Aikido differs so much from 'urban Aikido': it lies in the exposure to the elements and the purity of the Ki of heaven and the Ki of earth.

The Inner Path

We have learned that Aikido is an excellent means of (self-)education. In Aikido we distinguish three circles of harmony, so to say developmental fields. The first circle to cope with is self: bring yourself into balance in acknowledging your physical, mental and emotional needs: Harmonise with who you really are. Get to 'know thyself'.

The second circle is relation: reflect on how you build up, maintain and finish relations. Is this really trying to help your partners keeping or regaining their balance? Pre-condition: you cannot expect having harmonious relationships, when you are not balanced and centered yourself. Always keep in mind and heart that relation is something third, being created by you and the other.

The third circle of harmony is all creation, represented by nature. Re-connect to nature to observe the function of creation and learn about the cosmos which is the aggregate/the total of all laws of the universe (e.g. the hermetic laws, the tree of life).

Working through these three fields and unifying in them by yourself is referred to in the Japanese term 'Takemusu' to gain true 'Aiki'. This is the highest ideal of the founder's art, Takemusu Aiki as a permanent process, as a unifying work. This has been the professional basis in following our calling to teach Aikido - our craftsmanship.

When we were living in the Bavarian village, Kerstin took up her studies of pedagogics at the Munich university obtaining a master's degree to guarantee official recognition of 'our' Aiki pedagogics. Robert, as a Forest Engineer, began exploring alternative educational systems - from Montessori, Steiner and Pestalozzi, back to Comenius, to develop a unique subject-specific knowledge. In the late nineties, when more difficult children started to show up at the dojo, he engaged in self-study of developmental psychology and integral theory. At the turn of the millennium, he achieved the title of 'Budopadagoge', a formally recognised qualification for educationalists, therapists and psychologists. Later, both pursued self-directed study in attachment theory and nutritional psychology.

Spirituality: O Sensei and Western Mysticism

Nevertheless, working with children is demanding. One can easily deceive adults, but children can instantly tell when someone is merely pretending. And they do so directly and blunt. Therefore, it is an imperative to be absolutely authentic, especially in willing to become their teacher in the Way of Harmony. At any time, they may provoke you and test your ability to stay balanced, on all levels. Better to stay one step ahead of them - the most effective way to do so lies in spirituality. Young people live in the physical world, developing into and through their physical bodies; they externalise. Consequently, we sought a deeper meaning, a sense of internalisation. Yet this more 'spiritual' aspect - gaining a deeper understanding of Aikido and the principles of harmonisation alongside intensive technical training - was far more difficult to convey. There are many misleading paths, but if one always keeps in mind its immediate application in daily life, one might find the right path.

We assume that O Sensei was a brilliant martial artist and a mystic^[1]. He did not invent many techniques but added a higher purpose to his vast martial arts abilities, defining Aikido as true budo in the sense of stopping the fight. Thus, Aiki is not only the way of harmonisation with an opponent's force and intention, rather, in its origin, Aiki is the essential principle of creation operative even before the beginning of time. The teachings say, when you attune with this principle you act and live in complete harmony - the state of Takemusu Aiki. Nice to read, but impossible to achieve. Or almost impossible, as there are examples that do exist. Still, there are already benefits when you start thriving for it. The English translation of the book 'Takemusu Aikido' turned out to be the missing link for us between our practical Aikido experience and the 'cosmology of Aikido' as described in several books, e.g. by John Stevens.

Hoping to find a way to decipher O Sensei's enigmatic words and apply their meaning to our own lives, we have been studying Western mysticism since 1995. After extensive research we had decided to join a tuitional community. To this day, we have found no contradictions between this path and our knowledge and experience with Aikido. On the contrary, we have gained deep insights into the so-called cosmic laws (of harmony) and the functioning of the universe.

We believe that the combination of physical practice and spiritual studies has paved the way for us over the last three decades. Recent research in developmental psychology is now able to explain higher stages of consciousness and no longer stops at the end of adolescence. This helps us make sense of what we have experienced through over two and a half decades of intensive Aikido practice. It also allows us to better understand our clients' current state of consciousness and to create the conditions for healing and growth.



Of Samurai, Knights and Dames

In conclusion, it can be said that a proper attitude and a clear intention are crucial for manifesting things in our lives. Therefore, the final topic to be mentioned is chivalry. Both, Japan and Germany/France have a very long tradition in knighthood. We understand the Japanese term 'Do' as an appeal to foster virtues and to refine our character. In becoming a knight and a dame, you unite and harmonise your inner masculine and feminine aspects. In its deeper meaning the centrifugal and centripetal forces of personality, or, in concrete terms audacity (medieval 'aventure') and inner quest (medieval 'queste'). This is deeply rooted in archetypal structures within us and has a strong impact, especially on young people, as mentioned above. Thus, working on virtues is an important part of our daily work. We thrive for the beauty, the true and the good. A samurai/knight is not a soldier; you cannot buy him. His intention is not fighting, but protection - protection of himself, his people, mankind, the nature and life itself.

Similarly, in an occidental, Christian connotation, a knight and dame are followers of St. Martin, practising altruism. As O Sensei is quoted (in: Takemusu Aikido): "dealing with bad people is a great Aikido exercise". And St. Martin the knight teaches, "share what you have, but do not get off your horse", that is, do not become like those in need.

Ever since, we therefore work exclusively in non-profit contexts serving others and of course ourselves, as our acting should be sustainable. Gentleness and generosity were central virtues of medieval knighthood and the idea of "high courtly love," and they reappear in our practice of Aikido as a lived stance of conflict transformation. We've experienced that especially Aikido weapons practice fosters decisiveness (Aiki Ken) and perseverance (Aiki Jo), two of the virtues needed most in our social entrepreneurship.

So now we find ourselves high up in the quiet and peaceful mountains living a Yamabushi-like life - without the Japanese ascetic excesses - integrating all that we have chosen: social work,

nature conservation and deep relationships within family and community. Prospecting the future, we are now building cabins in different places on our ground to host guests and potential coresidents (Doka - not necessarily Aiki-Doka) in our 'Culture Oasis' (Kulturoase), a term envisioned by Rudolf Steiner, which meets most aspects of our conduct of life.

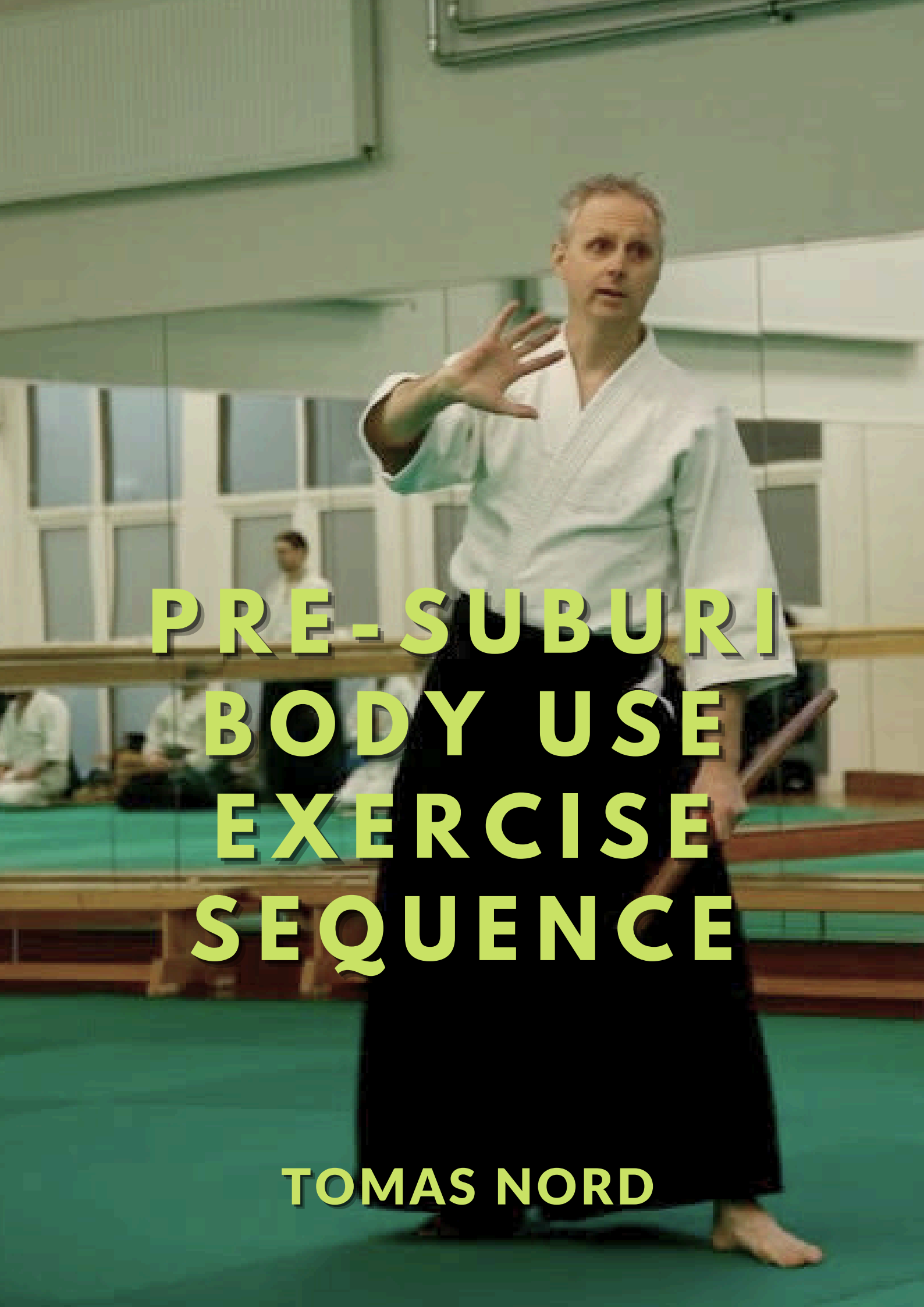
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[1] - Morihei Ueshiba: The Heart of Aikido - The Philosophy of Takemusu Aiki, Kodansha USA, ISBN: 978-1-56836-514-5

- John Stevens: The Essence of Aikido, Kodansha International, ISBN: 4-7700-1727-8

- John Stevens: The Secrets of Aikido, Shambhala Publications, ISBN: 1-57062-235-3



A man with short grey hair, wearing a white karate gi and black hakama, is performing a pre-suburi exercise in a dojo. He is standing on a green mat, with his right hand raised in a palm-forward position and his left hand holding a wooden bokken. The background shows a large room with windows and other people in the distance.

PRE-SUBURI BODY USE EXERCISE SEQUENCE

TOMAS NORD

In my previous article I wrote about approaching training from a principles perspective. I also mentioned there that, in my experience, body use can be one of the hardest things to change or improve. This especially holds for partner practice where we tend to focus more on the partner, achieving goals, and what is going on around us, than the details of how we use our bodies. Bad body use, however, makes us slower, stiffer, unbalanced, disconnected, and also makes us waste energy. This is not only true on the mat but in general daily life where good and efficient body use leads to lower risk of injuries, better health, and improved energy levels. In order to improve efficiency we need to take body use seriously, and one of the best ways of investigating and improving it is through solo practice. Solo practice is not about complicated exercises but about being able to take the time in an undisturbed way to investigate and work on how to make the body function in an efficient way.

The first bokken suburi is a great basic exercise and a good example. It is an important foundation for the bokken work in Aikido and we spend a lot of time with it. At the same time, as a tool for building good body use it is still a complex body movement. The body has a very large degree of flexibility as to how we get things done and some ways are more functional than others. In order to train and explore body use in the context of bokken work I often use the whole or parts of the below sequence, which provides ways to break down and explore various elements of the body use involved in the first suburi, and in extension, most of aikido practice. The sequence is presented in 4 steps, starting without the bokken, then looking at the left hand, the right hand, and finally the combination of both hands.

Part 1: No bokken

a) Leaning forwards and backwards - We start out without the bokken. The first aspect is to be able to experience that the body creates tension if there is a need to compensate for us not being centered and balanced. This can be either on the back or on the front of the body depending on in which way we are unbalanced. Stand with the feet parallel, about shoulder width, and with the arms relaxed at the side of the body. Slowly shift the weight of the upper body forward and notice if tension starts to build up in the back. Then slowly move back again, pass the neutral upright position and continue until slightly leaning backwards. Notice how the tension in the back reduces and when you pass neutral it starts to build up in the front of the body. Continue moving slowly back and forth and pay attention to the tension as it builds up and reduces. Doing this exercise helps build more sensitivity and awareness of the body being unbalanced and tense. Without good awareness of whether you are tense or not you are likely to improve slower than you otherwise could because you are happy to compensate for things not working with extra force (tension) without noticing. The only thing you would probably notice is that you seem to get tired more quickly than others and you might wonder why. Well, unnecessary tension burns extra energy.

b) Raise arms - In a similar vein to the above exercise, stand with the feet parallel and shoulder wide with the arms hanging to the sides. Slowly extend and raise the arms forward all the way until they are shoulder height and parallel to the floor. Just like above, notice what happens with the tensions in the body. If tension builds up in the back it is a sign that the weight shifted forward by your arms has not been compensated for by the rest of the body. If you are not able to notice any impact on your body it could be helpful to use a little bit extra weight to make it more clear. For instance, hold a bokken or jo with both hands and lift that forward in the same way. Your legs need to do some work, or rather, they need to be free to do some work. Often when the legs are not cooperating it is because of stiffness or holding patterns in the hip, knee, or ankle joints (or all of them). To work on this there is the next exercise ...



Exercise Par 1 b) Raise arms



Exercise Part 1 c) Dead arms

c) Dead arms, dead legs - for the dead arm exercise you need a chair, or something similar you can lean on. We will start with the right arm. Stand in front of the chair, slightly to the right side, with the legs relatively wide. Lean forward and put the left hand close to the edge of the seat of the chair. Let the right arm hang down from the shoulder and focus on having it completely relaxed (hence the term dead arm). Make small movements with the body, without tensing up the arm, to make the arm swing around a little bit. This does not need to be big movements. Small and relaxed is good. The exercise is to make the arm swing around in different directions and circles, stay fully relaxed, and to pay attention to any tensions or holding patterns that gets activated. Over time as you practice this the tensions and patterns will diminish and you will experience more freedom and relaxation for the shoulder. Move on to do the exercise in the same way for the left arm. The dead legs exercise is as you might guess the same exercise, but for the hip joint. If we start with the right leg, you need to find a place to stand on with the left leg where you can lean onto something (typically a wall) and support yourself with the right arm. You need to be far enough from the ground that the right leg can be hanging totally free and relaxed. In a similar way as for the arms, move the body slightly to create small movements in the leg and pay attention to the tensions or holding patterns that activate in the hip joint. Exercise for a while and then move on to do the same for the left leg.

d) Head and knee directions - I mentioned above in the raise arms exercise that the legs need to do some work. It is a bit more subtle than that. You do not do the work but rather allow the body to do it. By doing the above relaxation exercises you can get better at not being in the way of the body doing what it naturally wants to do. What you can do, though, to improve the body use further is to do exercises focusing directing the body. Two key directions are the head leading the way upwards and the knees leading the way forwards. To play with this stand with the feet parallel and hand to the side, as in the raise arms exercise. Imagine the head going all the way up to the sky, or the top of the head touching the ceiling. Switch back and forth between remembering the imagery of the

head leading up and relaxing the body. Notice if it has any impact on the body. Next, you do the same with the knees. Make sure the ankles, knees, and hips are very relaxed and free, and imagine the knees going forward very far or touching a wall way ahead of you. Switch back and forth between relaxing the body and joints and repeating the imagery of the knees going forward. Notice if it has any impact on your body. Once you feel comfortable with the exercises in isolation see if you can do both at the same time. The final step is to do both at the same time while doing the raising arms exercise. Now, notice if the body responds and naturally compensates for the shift of weight from the arms moving forward.

e) Swinging arms - once you have the above you are ready to do the swinging arms exercise. The exercise is basically using the head and knee directions to alternately fold and straighten the body, in order to allow the dead arms to swing back and forth. Using the head and knee directions to create the momentum of the arms means that the body stays centered, balanced, and relaxed the whole time. This is about creating the outer movement of the arms from the center of the body. It is very different in terms of body use from using the strength of the arms and shoulders to swing the arms. The arms should remain completely relaxed throughout the exercise. It is similar in nature to standing on a swing as a child and alternately putting weight on the back and front of the swing to generate the movement. This exercise is just fantastic. Do it a lot.

f) Raise Cut - next up is a small amendment to the swinging arms exercise. Pay more attention to the analogy with the child playing on a swing and try to find the timing of when you push on the back of the swing and when you push on the front. It might help to say "back" and "front" out loud as you are doing the exercise. Once you have the timing change the words to "raise" and "cut". I leave it to you to figure out what this might imply.

g) Hanmi swinging arms - Once the swinging arms and raise cut exercises feel comfortable it is an easy next step to take one step back with the left leg into right hanmi and do the same exercise. Pay attention to the knee directions. Each knee should point in the same direction as the corresponding foot. As the knees travel forward, they follow the same angled orientation established by the feet. Keep using the words "raise" and "cut" as the swing timers.

h) Hand on head swing - the last exercise before we pick up the bokken is the hand on head swing. Now we put everything we developed so far into one swing with the left hand. Put the left hand on top of your head and try to keep it there with as little strength as possible. Pay attention to your body use and that the head and knees are as you practiced above. To do the "cut", initiate from the center of your body by sending the knees away (while not losing the head direction) and relax the arm allowing the arm to come down. Pay attention to the arm being fully relaxed.



Exercise Part 1 h) Hand on head swing

Part 2: The left hand

It is now time to pick up the bokken. The idea is to connect to the bokken as though it was part of the body. As abstract as that might sound, the meaning is that what we have learned from the exercises above now apply to the combination package of body and bokken. The main connection to the bokken is via the left hand.

a) Baby grip - The left hand grips the bokken mainly with the little and ring fingers on the left hand. Wrap the two fingers around the bokken all the way down at the base of it. Have a feeling of rotating the base of the hand (the part just above the pisiform) around the bokken. Notice that this is subtly different from the feeling of squeezing the fingers and base together in a tensing motion. Practice grabbing the bokken by creating the baby grip and pay attention to keeping the wrist loose while maintaining a firm grip on the bokken. In this way you are creating a joint between your arm and the bokken. In line with the exercises above you do not want to tense this joint up, but it should stay free to move. A firm two finger grip with a loose wrist is the baby grip.



Exercise Part 2 a) Baby grip

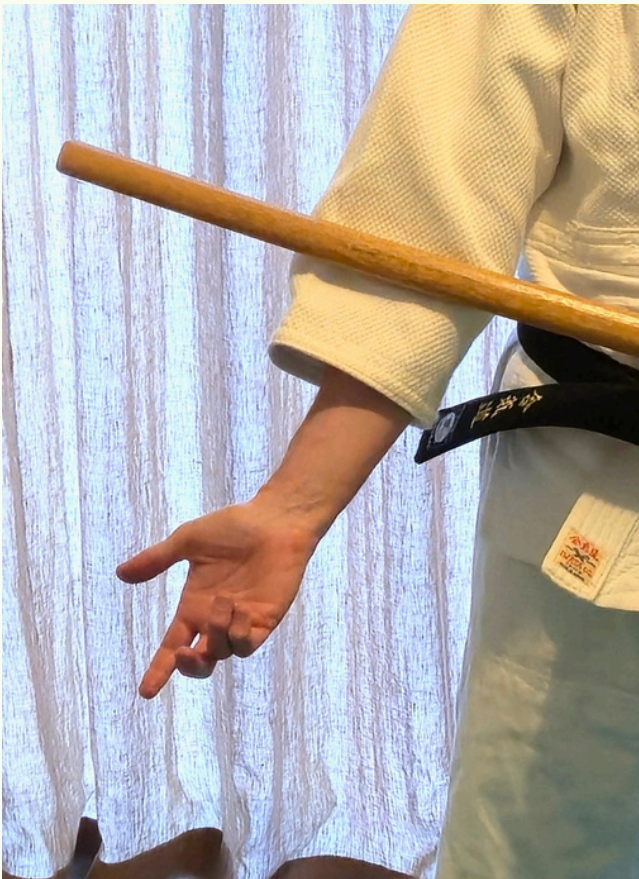
b) Hands on head swing - If you grab the bokken somewhere in the middle of it (so that it does not hit the floor) you can now repeat many of the swinging arms exercises Part 1 above. Note that there should be extension from the center into the arm so that the bokken feels like a part of the body. The bokken must not cause your shoulder to separate from your back. If you have something to hit, like a cushion or a sofa, you can also do this exercise by grabbing the bokken all the way at the end of it. Note that you need to hit something that stops the bokken since we have not yet introduced the right hand and you are not stopping the bokken with the left hand. Speaking of the right hand, let us introduce it.



Exercise Part 2 b) Hands on head swing

Part 3: The right hand

The power of the bokken cuts come from the connection to the center of the body via the left arm. The right arm helps stabilise and control the use of the bokken and allow us to stop the bokken cut in case we do not hit a target. In order to introduce the right hand without creating bad right arm tension habits I like to introduce the 2-finger hook as a training concept.



Exercise Part 3 a) The 2-finger hook



Exercise Part 3 b) 2-finger hook cut

a) The 2-finger hook - Stand with both feet parallel about shoulder width and with the arms hanging to the sides of the body. Turn the palm of the right hand so that it faces forward. Bend the two outer joints of the little and ring fingers about 90 degrees. This is the 2-finger hook. The bokken will fit right in. Pick up the bokken with the left hand and hold it across the front of your body so that the top part of the bokken can fall into the hook in the right hand. Slowly lift the bokken with the left hand up along your right arm (remember that the palm is facing forward) and let it slide back down into the hook. Repeat this so that you get used to the feeling of the hook. Once this feels solid, move to the next step. Let the bokken fall into the 2-finger hook and stay there. Now, extend your right arm such that the base of the hand rotates forward and over the 2-finger hook. This closes your grip around the bokken in the same way we described the rotating nature of the grip for the left hand above. Notice that you are extending your arm to close the grip, which is different from tensing the hand to lift the 2-finger hook up to the base of the hand to close the grip. Once you have closed the grip both hands have baby grips. The point of the 2-finger hook, however, is to allow the right hand to not always be closed around the bokken but instead be open to slide along it and close as needed.

b) 2-finger hook cut - The exercise is to do a gentle normal low power cut but with an adjustment such that the right hand uses only a 2-finger hook instead of a normal grip. This means you do not have a good way of stopping the bokken, hence the low power. It is also not a very stable way of cutting, however, as an exercise it puts the focus on the roles of the left and right hand. When this feels comfortable it is time to move onto how to stop the bokken at the end of the cut.

Part 4: Both hands

It is now time to get to using both hands in a synchronized way.

a) Mini-cuts - Stand in hanmi with the right foot in front holding the bokken in front of you. The left hand grips the very back of the bokken using the baby grip as practiced in 2 a) above. Let the right have the two finger hook under the bottom of the

bokken and gently extend the base of the hand to connect to the bokken and form a soft baby grip as practised in 3 b) above. Start making "mini-cuts" by using a small movement of the body to lift the bokken a short distance before letting it fall back down. Have a feeling of relaxing the baby grip when the bokken goes up and gently close it to form a baby grip to stop and stabilize the bokken when it falls back down. The shorter and more relaxed the lift the better and 5-10 cm movement of the tip of the bokken is enough for the exercise. The exercise puts focus on connecting the base of the hands (on the side of the little finger) with the top of the bokken and how this happens through extension body use as opposed to contraction or tension. As this exercise feels more and more comfortable one can increase the height of the cut.

b) No focus cut - Continue to stand in hanmi with the right foot in front and holding the bokken in front of you as practiced in a). Now gently raise the bokken above the head using very soft baby grips. Do a gentle cut, the power coming from the left arm in line with the hands on head exercises above. As the bokken comes down do not stop it sharply but instead "catch" it by slowing it through bending your legs. As you straighten the legs again, bring the bokken up above your head and start over. Find a rhythm of the movement and focus on using the body as the engine, both for the gentle cut and the raising of the bokken back up again.

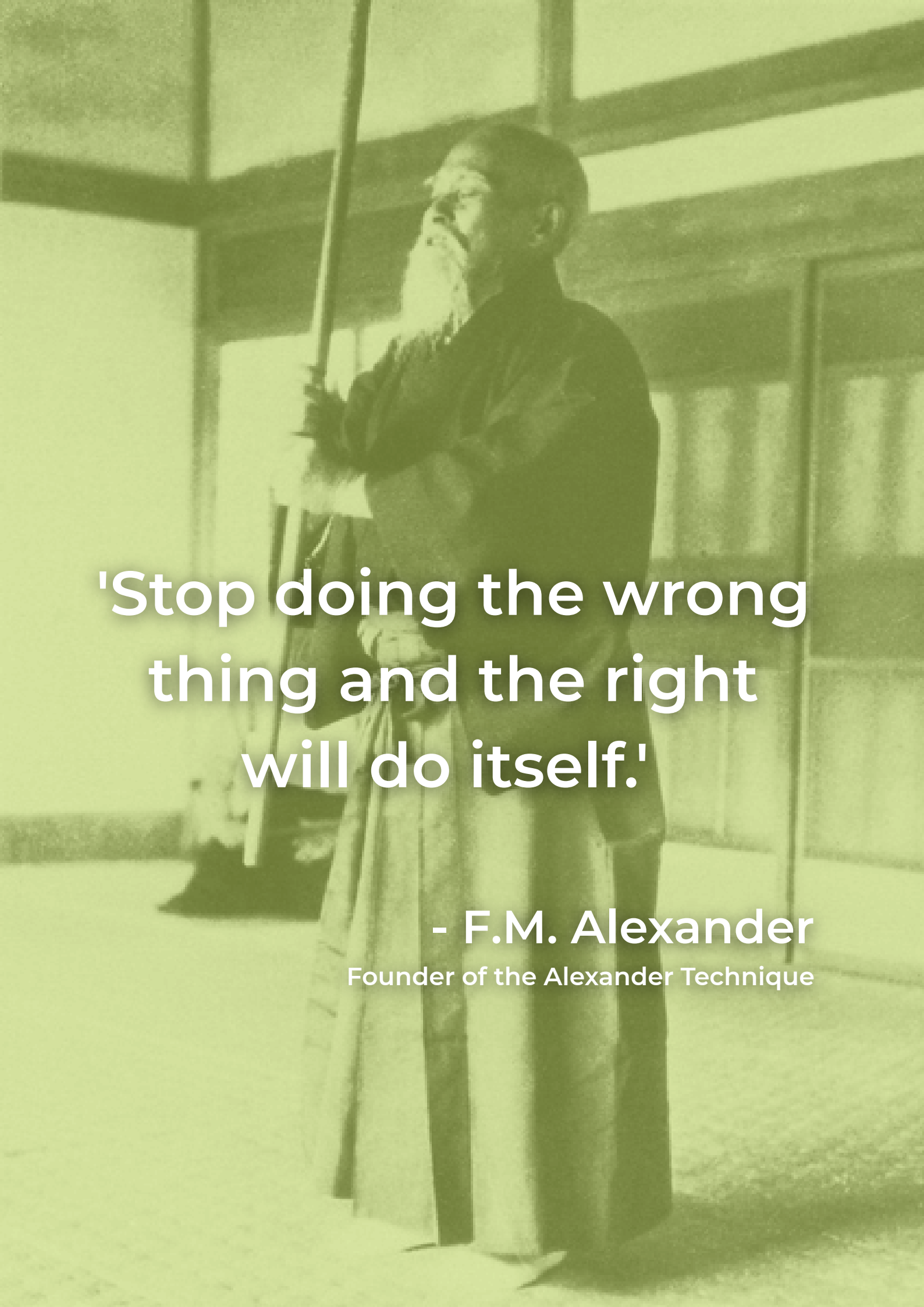


Exercise Part 3 b) 2-finger hook cut

c) Sometimes focus cut - as a variation on exercise b), start sometimes stopping and stabilising the bokken by using the closing of the baby grip as trained in the mini-cuts above. Alternate between stopping and not stopping the bokken and getting into the rhythm and body use of the swing. When you stop the bokken pay attention that it happens through an extension in the arms that puts the base of the hands onto the top of the bokken. Also pay attention to the feeling of weight and the stability of your lower body and legs.

d) First suburi - Start in hanmi with the right foot forward. Hold the bokken in front of you with a slight wedge from the bottom left to the top right. Make sure the bokken is neither too cramped towards your stomach or too extended away from your body such that your shoulders start coming forwards. Raise the bokken with a feeling of extension, the power coming from your base. At the same time let the front foot move backwards to the heel of the left foot. Raise your arms all the way until the bokken is vertical behind and close to your back. Your hands should be relaxed with a soft baby grip. Start the cut as in the hands on head swing exercise paying attention to the power in the cut coming from the weight of the body and going through the left arm to the bokken. Let the right foot move forward again and find a good base. Stop and stabilise the cut exercised above. The feeling should be that of a very stable base for the body and the arms and bokken landing on top of this stable base in a relaxed way. Take a brief moment of attention and then do a slight adjustment to go back to the hanmi starting position as above.

Body use principles can be one of the hardest things to change or improve in training. The above exercises can very much help with building a body use coordinated from a center functionally connected to the ground, and where the power is exercised through extension from the center. These are central principles that also translate to Aikido in general. I hope that you might find some or all of these exercises interesting or something to come back to during your own training. As always, have fun while training.



'Stop doing the wrong
thing and the right
will do itself.'

- F.M. Alexander

Founder of the Alexander Technique



IN FLUX

THE STORY OF THE
BYAKUDO AIKIDO DOJO

GABOR ZSOLT SZABO



Where does the story of a dojo start? Perhaps, in my case, it starts in Hungary, towards the end of 1998, when as a university student I first tried aikido at the SZAKE dojo in Szeged, but it was a little later in Tibor Kökény sensei's independent dojo that I fell in love with it. He just returned from France after training extensively with Marc Bachraty and Christian Tissier and his dynamic and fun lessons with plenty of ukemi really appealed to me.

Unfortunately, when I finished university in 2002 I had to leave Szeged, and after long discussions with my sensei he suggested that I to start teaching, at a mere 3rd kyu grade, in my hometown, Mezőberény. I was lucky with the secondary school I was teaching at providing space and that there was interest from complete beginners (aikido was still quite new in Hungary, only picking up in the 1990s, after the end of the Soviet block), so they were happy to learn ukemi and basic techniques taught in an even more basic way.

In 2004, I moved to London, and after a few months I found Bjorn Saw sensei's dojo in north London, and my journey through Morihiro Saito's aikido started. It was a very happy period, marked by dan gradings by Ulf Evenas sensei up to 3rd dan in 2016. Due to moving to south London and work commitments, I could not attend the dojo as much as I wanted to, and at 2nd dan and being equipped with an aikido teacher certificate I opened my dojo in Bermondsey, south London in November, 2015.

From the initial location at a secondary school, we moved to the Bede Centre in April, 2016. At this point, it was still only adults, low in numbers but high in spirit.

The first milestone was probably the first kids class on 5th May 2018, but they started on a regular basis from 15th September.

The second milestone was organising our first seminar in 2019 with Hoa Newens sensei. We were inexperienced and although everyone who attended appreciated sensei's teaching, there were lessons to learn. Hopefully, the next UK seminar with Hoa sensei that we are organising with Lewis sensei and Brendon Buchanan sensei will be an amazing one in every way in October, 2027.



Eitaro and Rafay doing kumi jo during covid.



Kids seem to love the idea of subduing the teacher.



Students may not always follow instructions.

During COVID, we tried online classes, which did not pick up, but luckily, we could train in one of the local parks early on.

Due to construction work at the Bede Centre and finding a suitable space at the school where I started to teach in 2019, we relocated to the Charter School North Dulwich during the autumn of 2021.

This also brought about a name change, since there was an old, established dojo already with the name Shoshinkan, and we were not in Bermondsey any more, so from Shoshinkan Dojo – Aikido Alive Bermondsey we changed to Byakudo Aikido (Aikido Alive Dulwich).

In this constant flux, the next milestone was joining the TAE dojos in November 2022, in tandem with Bjorn Saw sensei and his new dojo in Wells. I have known Lewis sensei for a long time and have attended seminars and camps with him and Bjorn knew him from the time they trained together in Iwama. Still, I am adjusting some of the finer details of the techniques and movements, in order to get ready for my yondan grading sometime in the future, as well as teaching my students according to what Lewis sensei expects.



The first ever session with Szabina, Olivier and me.

Another milestone was helping one of my students, Deborah Hyams, achieve shodan in November, 2024.

Finally, the most recent milestone is the success story of Mimi, one of our junior members. She started with us in 2018 at the age of six (in photo 3 above), and after a long time of dedicated practice this year she has participated in two adult seminars: one in March organised by Fiona Blyth sensei with six high-ranked female aikido teachers and one with Ulf Evenas sensei in May, organised by Richard Power sensei. Perhaps one day, she will have her own seminar!

For more information about Byakudo Dojo visit:

www.byakudoaikido.weebly.com

Information and registration for the October 2027 Residential Intensive can be found here:

www.takemusuaidomidlands.com/seminars/takemusu-residential-october-2027



New name ("Ni Ga Byaku Do"), new space, same "founding" student: Olivier.



Gabor and Mimi training together.

HOA NEWENS & LEWIS BERNALDO DE QUIROS

Takemusu Aikido Residential Intensive
15 - 17 October 2027
Kidderminster, UK

Scan the QR code for more info and registration or visit:
takemusuaidomidlands.com/seminars/takemusu-residential-october-2027



Deborah receiving her Shodan certificate.

FOUNDATION TRAINING BOOK & APP REVIEW

Foundation: Redefine Your Core, Conquer Back Pain, and Move with Confidence (2011)

By Eric Goodman, Peter Park

True to Form: How to Use Foundation Training for Sustained Pain Relief and Everyday Fitness (2018)

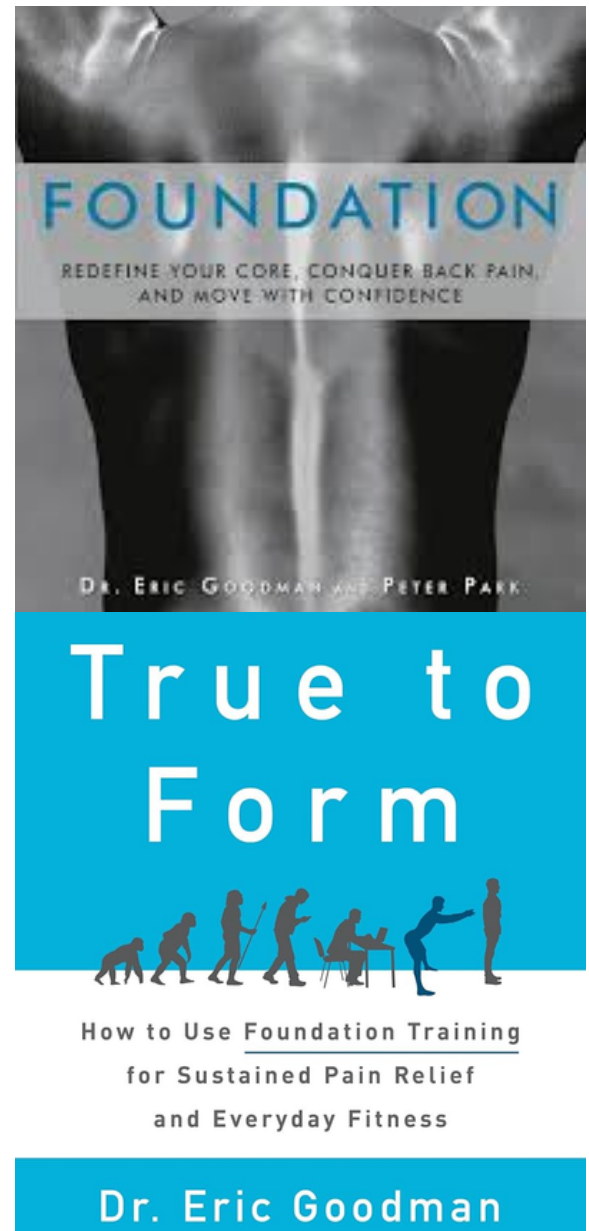
By Eric Goodman

Foundation Training App: Available on Google Play and Apple App Store

The Modern Postural Problem

Modern Aikido practitioners increasingly arrive on the mat with bodies shaped not by farm work, manual labour, or daily walking, but by chairs, screens, and compression. The result is familiar to every instructor: collapsed chests, inhibited breathing, weak posture, and a general inability to maintain structure without tension. Aikido training often assumes a structural readiness that many students simply do not possess. Eric Goodman's Foundation Training - a system built on decompression breathing, posterior-chain integration, and hip-hinge mechanics - offers a compelling corrective, it provides a structural literacy that aligns surprisingly well with the demands of traditional budo.

Foundation Training began as Goodman's personal solution to debilitating back pain. His insight was simple: most modern discomfort arises from a body that has lost its ability to lengthen, integrate, and distribute load through the hips. The system he developed teaches practitioners to reclaim these capacities through a series of accessible, principle-driven exercises. For Aikidoka, the relevance is immediate. The method's emphasis on posterior-chain activation (spinal erectors, gluteals, hamstrings, calf and bottom of feet) mirrors the grounded, tensile organisation required for stable hanmi and effective kokyu. Its signature decompression breathing parallels the expansive, three-dimensional breath that underlies aiki body mechanics. And its hip-hinge model resonates with the traditional understanding of koshi and core as the engine of movement.



At the heart of Foundation Training is the idea that the body must first lengthen and decompress before it can integrate and strengthen, in essence the principle that structure precedes technique. Goodman's approach begins with decompression breathing: an intentional expansion of the rib cage that lifts the thoracic spine, creates space between vertebrae, and awakens the deep stabilisers of the body. For Aikido practitioners accustomed to chest-down, abdomen-tight postures, this can be revelatory. The breath becomes not merely oxygen exchange but a structural force - an internal expansion that supports relaxed stable power. This is the same logic that informs kokyu body mechanics and the vertical "unweighting" found in Aikido.

The Books and App

Dr. Goodman has written two books that illustrate the evolution of Foundation Training, with a third that covers wider health topics. *Foundation: Redefine Your Core, Conquer Back Pain, and Move with Confidence* (2011) serves as an introduction to the early stages of Foundation Training and offers an alternate definition of the 'core'. *True to Form: How to Use Foundation Training for Sustained Pain Relief and Everyday Fitness* (2018) covers how to integrate the movements into daily life. Goodman's books present his ideas with clarity and pedagogical precision; they articulate a coherent model of body organisation, supported by strong illustrations and progressive sequencing. The Founder, the system's central exercise, teaches global posterior-chain activation through a controlled hip hinge. For Aikidoka, this maps directly onto the feeling of moving from the hips and centre rather than from the shoulders or lower back. The books also introduce Anchors, a method of rooting through the feet and hands to create distal-to-proximal stability - an idea that resonates with classical budo concepts of whole-body connection. The limitations of the books are obvious for any movement based practice: certain nuances of decompression breathing and scapular integration are difficult to convey without demonstration, and some readers may over-extend in pursuit of "length." Still, as introductory texts and references, they are excellent.

The limitations of the books are addressed through the Foundation Training app, which pushes the method into daily practice through bitesize lessons. Its high-quality video instruction, short modular sessions, and structured programs make it particularly useful for Aikido practitioners seeking consistent solo work. The app excels at providing clear movement cues - covering all the core poses like the Founder, the 8-Point Plank, and lunge decompression, with each instructor adding their own variations. Its greatest strength is accessibility: a practitioner can perform a meaningful session in five to ten minutes, making it ideal for morning activation or pre-class warm-ups. The app's limitations are similar to the books: some sessions assume prior familiarity, and often emphasise intensity over subtlety. But for most Aikidoka, the app offers a reliable way to reinforce daily decompression and posterior-chain engagement.

Practical Integration for the Dojo

Foundation Training does not add something foreign to Aikido; it restores capacities that Aikido assumes. For dojos, the practical applications are straightforward. Three to five minutes of decompression breathing at the start of class can dramatically improve students' ability to maintain posture and relax unnecessary tension. Variations of the Founder can be integrated into warm-ups to awaken the posterior chain before bukiwaza or taijutsu. Anchors can be used to teach rooting and distal-to-proximal stability, improving the quality of hanmi and the integrity of footwork and transitions. Instructors may find Foundation Training particularly useful for addressing common dysfunctions: collapsed chests, lumbar over-extension, inactive glutes, and the habitual "shoulder-driven" movement that undermines both stability and whole body connection.

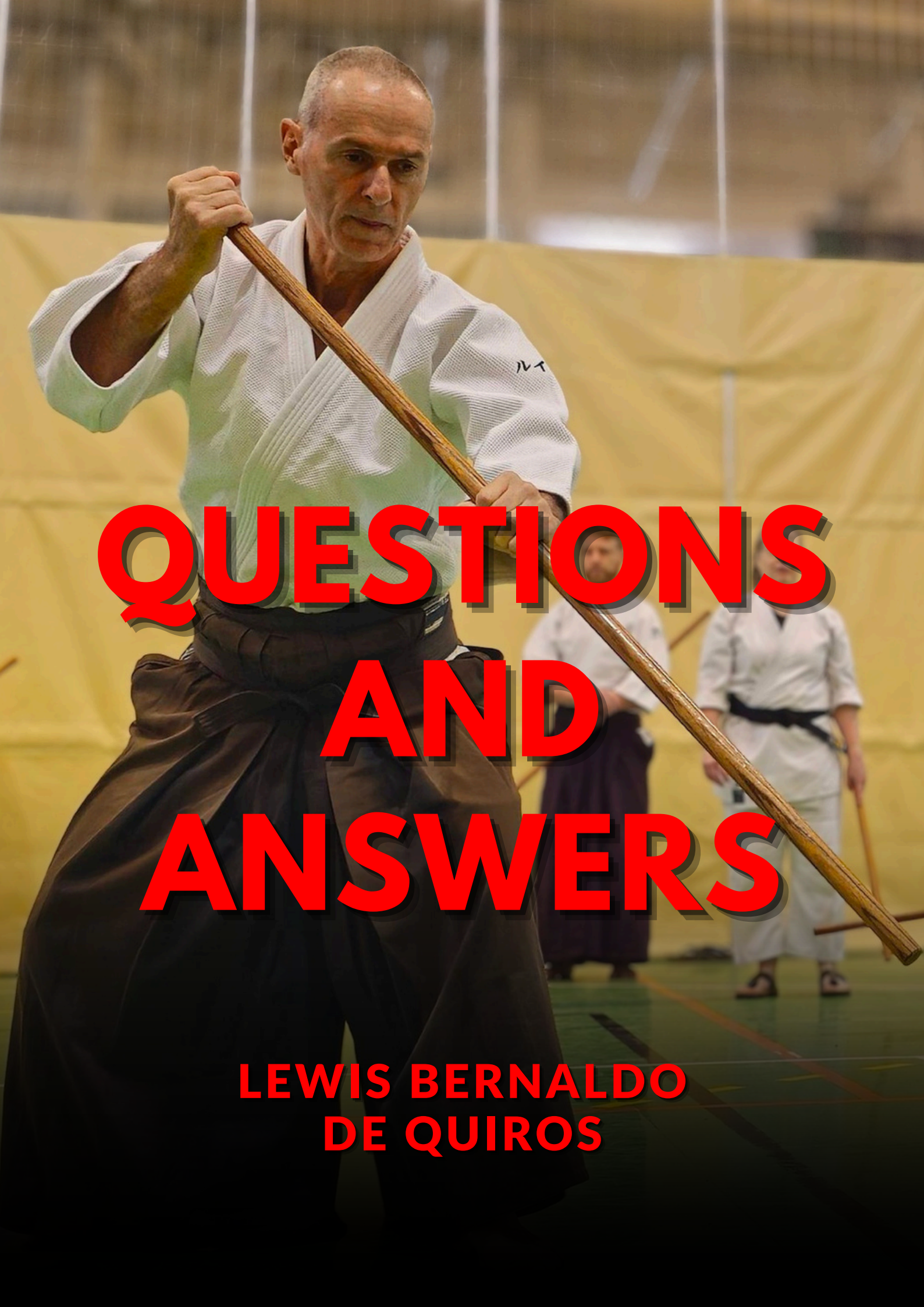
Ultimately, Foundation Training is a structural literacy system - a method for teaching the body how to lengthen, integrate, and move with integrity. For Aikido practitioners and teachers navigating the realities of modern posture, it offers a practical, principle-aligned way to restore the physical capacities that budo training presupposes. The books provide conceptual clarity; the app provides daily reinforcement. Together, they form a valuable adjunct for any dojo seeking to strengthen fundamentals, reduce injury, and cultivate the kind of relaxed, grounded power that Aikido at its best embodies.

As the actor Matthew McConaughey puts it: "This stuff is just plain good for you."

Where to Begin?

I'd suggest you feel it for yourself with the simple (not easy!) 12 minute routine on YouTube, if it piques your interest try the app with a 7-day free trial:

[CLICK HERE](#)

A man in a white karate gi with a black belt is holding a wooden staff (Jo) in a martial arts dojo. He is in a ready stance, looking forward. In the background, two other people in white gi are visible, one holding a Jo. The background is a yellow wall.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

LEWIS BERNALDO
DE QUIROS



Why does every Kumitachi end in the position it does, with Uketachi controlling Uchitachi's centre line? Where does this concept come from? Why not just perform a killing/injuring cut like in other sword styles or in Iai?

The final position in the kumitachi represents a finish emphasising the martial concept of Katsujinken (the sword that preserves life) versus Satsujinken (the sword that takes life). Katsujinken refers to the martial ideal of using martial skill to preserve life, promote justice and restore harmony versus simply killing the other. The philosophical concept antedates Aikido by centuries finding its inception into Japanese Bujutsu around the 17th century with the Yagyu Shinkage Ryu school of swordsmanship. This philosophy was fully adopted by Morihei Ueshiba into his Aikido and in particular into his swordsmanship. By controlling the center line the opponent is 'stopped' unable to continue the attack. By closing the distance this finishing strike on the center line becomes a killing finish through the head or neck. These two positions cannot be separated and in fact Satsujinken (combat skill) is necessary for the ethical application (Katsujinken).

How does Aikido Koshi Nage differ from Judo-style hip throws? Why do we not practice other hip throws ?

I came into Aikido from a (distant youth) Judo background and at first could not understand the applicability of aikido hip throws. I had spent a considerable time in Judo both learning them and learning how to block and counter them (in competition) so Aikido hip throws looked very unrealistic and easily countered - until Sensei used me as uke. Then I felt in his execution that there was no way for me to block it. He also pointed out that Koshi nage was an extension of Kokyu nage technique and was 99% kokyu (extension). Judo hip throws (in my limited view) are much easier to learn and depend on opening and leverage (eg o goshi). If resisted I can 'force it through' if I have enough set up. However this is never the case with an aikido hip throw. If the timing positioning and extension work is not essentially perfect (and therefore un-counterable) it will not work. Hence Koshi nage are really 'advanced' techniques in aikido. I have seen other Aikido lines incorporate Judo hip throws into Aikido but do not recommend this. They work on different principles and have different origins hence they are mixing oil with water in my opinion.

There appears to be 2 ways to perform shichi no awase: 1. Either the initial yokomen attack is received as in go no awase into the press, and then the form continues. 2. The attack is received with a light 'catch' and then pressed down. Both seems to offer different learning points but which is the way you recommend training it the most? Also, which way should it be exhibited for grading examinations?

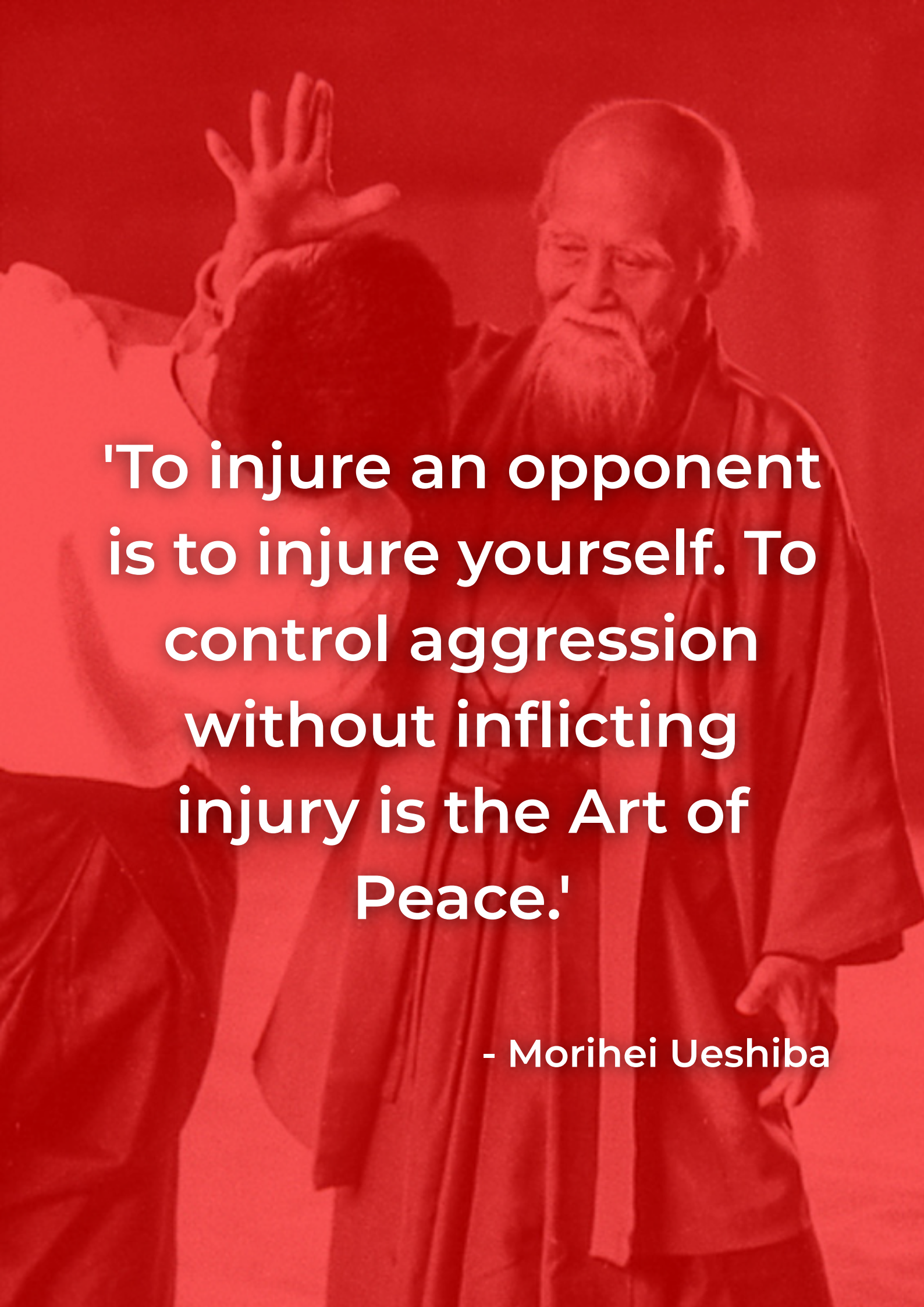
The form as you describe in 1 is the basic form. However the 'catch' is not the same as in go no awase where every cut finishes on the centreline of uchitachi. The first parry in shichi no awase is a block (bokken aligned with the side of the body) where we catch/stick to uchitachi's ken before pressing it down whereby he continues into a thrust (as in the 7th suburi). Step 2 is a progression whereby we catch and press down in one movement. At this second level uchitachi still pauses before thrusting. In level three everything becomes connected into one movement. So level one has three movements, level 2 two and level 3 one movement. Each is a progression built on the previous one. In examinations we ask for the first most basic level.

I recall you once saying 'bodybuilding kills aikido'. Is this because one would tend to rely on force, because the dimensions would block smooth flowing movements, or something else? I would like to develop more muscle for symmetry and power but have been reluctant due to concerns that if my upper back prevents the bokken reaching the spine in suburi and alters my cut, will this affect other areas of Aikido study and create technical difficulties?

I think there must have been more context to my comment. I am no expert on body building per se but what I often see is that many body building exercises (with machines especially) work on parts of the body in isolation, focusing on particular muscles or muscle groups to be developed. There is nothing wrong with this in principle if you are being guided well and the training programme addresses the body fully. However the power we seek in martial arts is generally derived from the functioning and movement of the whole body and not isolated parts. In this sense the 'dynamic' of cultivating power based on isolated body parts may not translate so well into power based on whole body movement.

That implies as far as strength training in martial arts is concerned, that generally speaking when doing training to develop functional strength we will prefer exercises which include the whole body over exercises focusing on isolated parts with a particular focus on the 'back train' of the body: legs, glutes and back.

One of the issues that surfaced for me was that in training my focus was on being essential and simple in body movement and technique aiming to generate power with minimum effort both as uke with ukemi (you will have noticed that I teach how to use momentum as a source of power—for example, when standing back up after a roll—as well as how to respond technically as nage. As a result I lasted longer, sweated less and rarely got out of breath while training. All great improvements. But I noticed my physical condition began to drop as my Aikido training did not really address the levels of cardiovascular and physical strength levels I perceived as basic for me. So I expanded my weekly training to minimally address and maintain these areas. But in the end all my training revolves around Aikido and reinforces it, never contradicting it.



**'To injure an opponent
is to injure yourself. To
control aggression
without inflicting
injury is the Art of
Peace.'**

- Morihei Ueshiba

SEMINAR SCHEDULE

2026 - 2027

Visit the TAE Website Seminar page for up-to-date information:

www.traditionalaikido.eu/seminars.html

25-26 JULY

Wells, UK

Seminar with Bjorn Saw

Contact: Bjorn:

aikidoalive@yahoo.co.uk

31 JUL - 2 AUG

Dorset, UK

Seminar with Johnny Jacobsen

Contact: Mark

contact@wellspringsaikido.co.uk

14-16 AUGUST

Malmsheim, Germany

Seminar with Lars Landberg

Contact: Barbara

coyote.blue@gmx.net

15-16 AUGUST

Glumsø, Denmark

Seminar with Thomas Nord

Contact:

chushin.aikido.dojo@gmail.com

7-11 SEPTEMBER

Zurich, Switzerland

Uchideshi Week

Contact: info@kokorodojo.ch

12-13 SEPTEMBER

Zurich, Switzerland

Seminar with Lina Olivia

Gustavsson

Contact: info@kokorodojo.ch

18-20 SEPTEMBER

San Mateo, US

Seminar with Hoa Newens and Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros

Contact: Lewis lewisbdeq@gmail.com

2-4 OCTOBER

Dorset, UK

Seminar with Thomas Nord

Contact: Mark

contact@wellspringsaikido.co.uk

3 OCTOBER**Norfolk, UK****One Day Intensive with Johnny Jacobsen & Michael Ormerod**Contact: Sarina
chetvalleyaikido@gmail.com**10-11 OCTOBER****Copenhagen, Denmark****Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros**Contact: Lars
lars@aikido-copenhagen.dk**17-18 OCTOBER****Wells, United Kingdom****Seminar with Bjorn Saw**Contact: Bjorn
aikidoalive@yahoo.co.uk**24 OCTOBER****Oisterwijk, NL****Seminar with Richard van Berkum**

Contact: contact@aikido-oisterwijk.nl

24-25 OCTOBER**Magdeburg, Germany****Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros**Contact: Christiane
christiane@laehnemann.de**24-25 OCTOBER****Motril, Spain****Seminar with Michael Ormerod**Contact:
info@aikidotradicional.eu**7-8 NOVEMBER****Weesp NL****Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros**Contact: Arjan
xzeroxz@gmail.com**21-22 NOVEMBER****Dorset, UK****Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros**Contact: Mark
contact@wellspringsaikido.co.uk**11-13 DECEMBER****Praesto, Denmark****Intensive with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros**

Contact: chushin.aikido.dojo@gmail.com

22-25 JANUARY**Kidderminster, UK****Winter Intensive**Contact: Brendon
brendonsan@gmail.com

29-31 JANUARY**Malmsheim, Germany**
Seminar with Lars Landberg

Contact: Barbara
coyote.blue@gmx.net

12-14 MARCH**Lancaster UK**
Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros

Contact: Ellie
edenvir@gmail.com

27-28 MARCH**Weesp, NL**
Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros

Contact: Arjan xzeroxz@gmail.com

9-11 APRIL**Fredericksburg USA**
Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros

Contact: Lewis: lewisbdeq@gmail.com

4-8 MAY**Motril, Spain**
Spring Intensive with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros
Contact: Lewis: lewisbdeq@gmail.com**28-30 MAY****Glumso, Denmark**
Spring Intensive with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros
Contact: chushin.aikido.dojo@gmail.com**5-6 JUNE****Zutphen, NL**
Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros
Contact: Richard
z4nshin@gmail.com**18-20 JUNE****Cumbria, UK**
Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros
Contact: Adrian
adrian@radecol.co.uk**19-24 JULY 2027****Urnäsch, CH**
TAE Summer Camp with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros
Contact: [See link](#)**18-19 SEPTEMBER****Copenhagen, Denmark**
Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros
Contact: Lars
lars@aikido-copenhagen.dk

15-17 OCTOBER**Kidderminster, UK
Seminar with Hoa Newens and
Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros**

Contact: Brendon
brendonsan@gmail.com

30-31 OCTOBER**Weesp, NL
Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo de
Quiros**

Contact: Arjan
xzeroxz@gmail.com

19-21 NOVEMBER**Dorset UK
Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo de
Quiros**

Contact: Mark
allcock_mark@sky.com

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