

EDITION 14
WINTER
2025

TAE JOURNAL

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF
TRADITIONAL AIKIDO EUROPE

REAL LIFE AIKIDO

AIKIDO AND SELF DEFENCE

**HOW TO USE PRINCIPLES TO
IMPROVE TRAINING QUALITY**

**STAGES IN OUR
WEAPONS PRACTICE**

**DOJO PORTRAIT:
TAKEMUSU AIKIDO DEN HAAG**



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**“Life is growth.
If we stop
growing,
technically and
spiritually, we
are as good as
dead.”**

— Morihei Ueshiba

The Inume Pass in Kai Province by Hokusai
(1760–1849), part of his Thirty-six Views of
Mount Fuji series.

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EDITORIAL

BY ANDREA PFISTERER



WELCOME TO THE 14TH EDITION OF THE TAE JOURNAL

'Does aikido work in a real fight?' Probably all of us have – at some point in their aikido journey - gotten questions about the 'applicability' of aikido. I let you ponder on what your answer was then, and how maybe your answers have changed with time.

In her article 'Real Life Aikido', rather than immediately answering, Ruth Meili first dissects the question and looks at it under her fine-focused microscope: what actually is meant by 'real life' or a 'real fight', but also: does it make sense to make a distinction of 'Aikido on the mat' and 'Aikido in real life'? Her article is an invitation to reflect on your own answers again and to revisit situations in YOUR real life where you applied aikido.

In this issue we start a three-part exploration of Aikido and self-defence, thus narrowing in on how aikido training can empower one's safety in the general environment. If you want to know what Code Yellow is, how Reigi and Zanshin can help you to stay there and if you want to be better prepared for the Urban jungle, read Part 1: Zanshin, by Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros.

Last month, TAEs Grading Committee has reworked the backbone of our organization, the technical syllabus by adding requirements for 6th Dan.

While the other sections have not changed, it is always great to review the syllabus again and check for yourself if and how you apply it in your training. In his article, Tomas Nord discusses how the forms can serve to improve one's understanding and embodiment of the Principles of Aikido. Referring to the 'key section' of the syllabus, he reminds us how on each level of development there is a shift of focus on other principles. Using practical examples, his article can help to understand what mindful training can look like and how e.g. distance and timing principles can be studied during day- to day-training.

Very much related to this, Adrian Punt breaks weapons training down into three stages. This allows beginners and experienced practitioners to work together, while accessing and exploring different stages.

And ultimately, if you've ever wondered whether attending seminars in other martial arts is worth it, read about Ellie Denvir's encounter with Ellis Amdur and his approach to weapons training!



SUBSCRIBE



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:

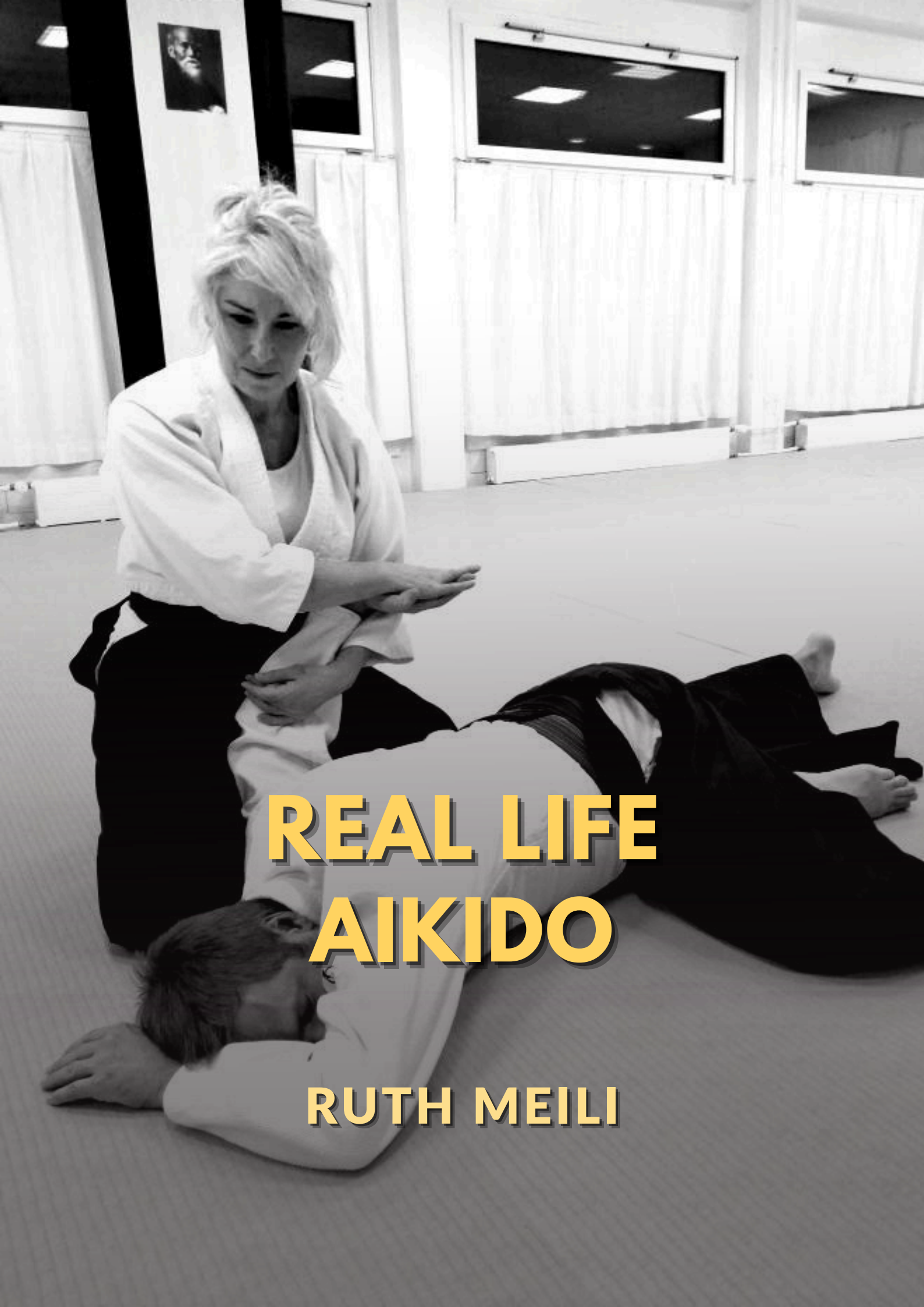


YouTube:



Contact:





REAL LIFE AIKIDO

RUTH MEILI

In Aikido teachings and demonstrations, I sometimes hear remarks on the lines of, “This is the pin/strike we do here on the mats. In real life, though, it would be this...” followed by a rather cruel variation of the technique, intended to seriously injure or even kill. Also, questions like “Would that work on the street?” are common. These sorts of comments in Aikido contexts puzzle me for several reasons:

- What kind of “real life” do people have who seem to be okay with seriously harming others?
- What is meant by “real life” anyway? Isn’t Aikido on the mat real?
- When asking, ‘Does Aikido work on the street?’—what is meant by ‘effective’ in Aikido? Why does it seem different on the street? What kind of streets and situations are we talking about?

When terms as “real-life Aikido” and “on the street” are used, it suggests that Aikido on and off the mats is considered as different - not just in the sense of “training versus application,” but also in its inherent meaning:

- On the mat, we emphasize that Aikido is non-violent and that the very idea is to resolve conflicts without causing harm. Yet, outside the dojo, it seems acceptable, even advisable, to seriously hurt or kill someone, say in defense of our loved ones or if we were attacked on our way home.

- Even advanced Aikido on the mat is doubted to be effective in real-world conflict resolution.

Yet, to me, the distinction between “Aikido on the mat” and “Aikido in real life” does not always make sense. For one, the mat is a significant part of my real life. I spend a lot of time there, whilst feeling very vivid and real. Secondly, my life outside the dojo doesn’t typically involve street fights with hostile strangers. I’m a project manager, a therapist, and a family member. Up to now, I’ve barely encountered situations where someone wanted to physically harm me. I am I lucky in that regard, I admit^[1]. My point is, that I wonder, how often street fights are mentioned, when it comes to “real life Aikido”, whereas not only me, but many other privileged Aikido practitioners, have not much idea of how street fights do proceed. Thus, if they talk about what should be done “out there”, it seems more of a fantasy, maybe nourished by movies and overheard stories.

[1] I fully recognize that some people have faced severe violence in their lives, causing fear and trauma. I am aware that my perspective is a privileged one and I absolutely do not want to diminish painful or horrifying experiences.

Conversation on the Mat: Cheatsheet for Uke

Don’t

Comment

Explain

Share all you know

Tell your life story

Refer to the street

Quote O Sensei

Small talk

Assume you know better

Do

Shut up

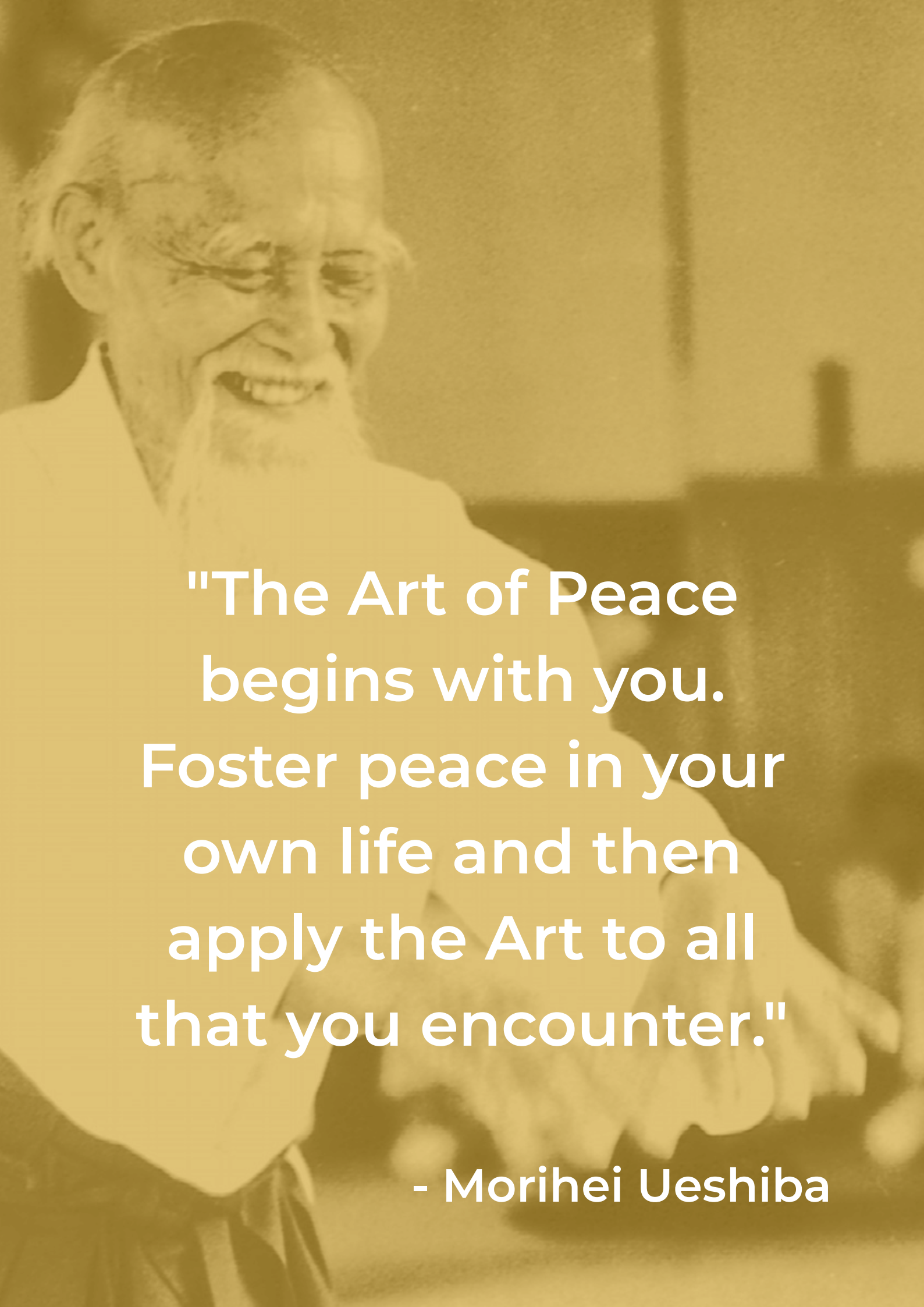
So, if it comes to application of Aikido in real life, for me, fortunately, it does not involve in street fights. Nevertheless, my daily life presents various chances, to experience highly effective Aikido: Since I started practicing, I've become calmer, more friendly, more centred, more empathetic and more successful in resolving conflicts. I even remember tense situations where physical violence was imminent, and where I was able to de-escalate simply by touching someone in the mindful way, I learned on the Aikido mat. Of course, I still end up in friction. I'm not particularly harmony-seeking by nature, and I recall many conflicts that I didn't resolve well. However, I believe this is due to my lack of Aikido skill rather than Aikido itself being ineffective. I'm convinced that Aikido works.

Beyond this "real-life" framework, I have a more theoretical concern when I hear about cruel techniques for "the street." The Art of Peace, as the founder O Sensei Morihei Ueshiba referred to his discipline, doesn't end when we leave the dojo. So why should it be acceptable to violate or kill others outside the dojo? Because we're threatened or hurt? On a basic survival level, I would say yes! We are meant to defend ourselves and stay safe. That is how we are psychologically designed. However, the values embodied in Aikido go beyond survival. In the bigger picture, it doesn't necessarily matter whether I or my attacker survives. Apart from the fact that Aikido is designed to avoid this sort of decisions as much as possible: How can I know that my reasons for survival are more valid than someone else's? Why should I assume, I can judge others' reasons for attacking me? These thoughts may be theoretical. However, as soon as someone argues with "the original meaning of Aikido", I think this should be taken in account.

And although - by nature and depending on how scared we are - our immediate reaction in conflicts often is fighting back and causing harm: Is this, what we want to train and have in mind, when practicing? For me, no. I don't want to nurish cruel fantasies by watching brutal technique demonstrations. It is the opposite. The very reason to step on the mat for me (well, apart from having fun) is, to learn to control my impulses and establish creative, non-violent reaction patterns - even towards potential attackers.

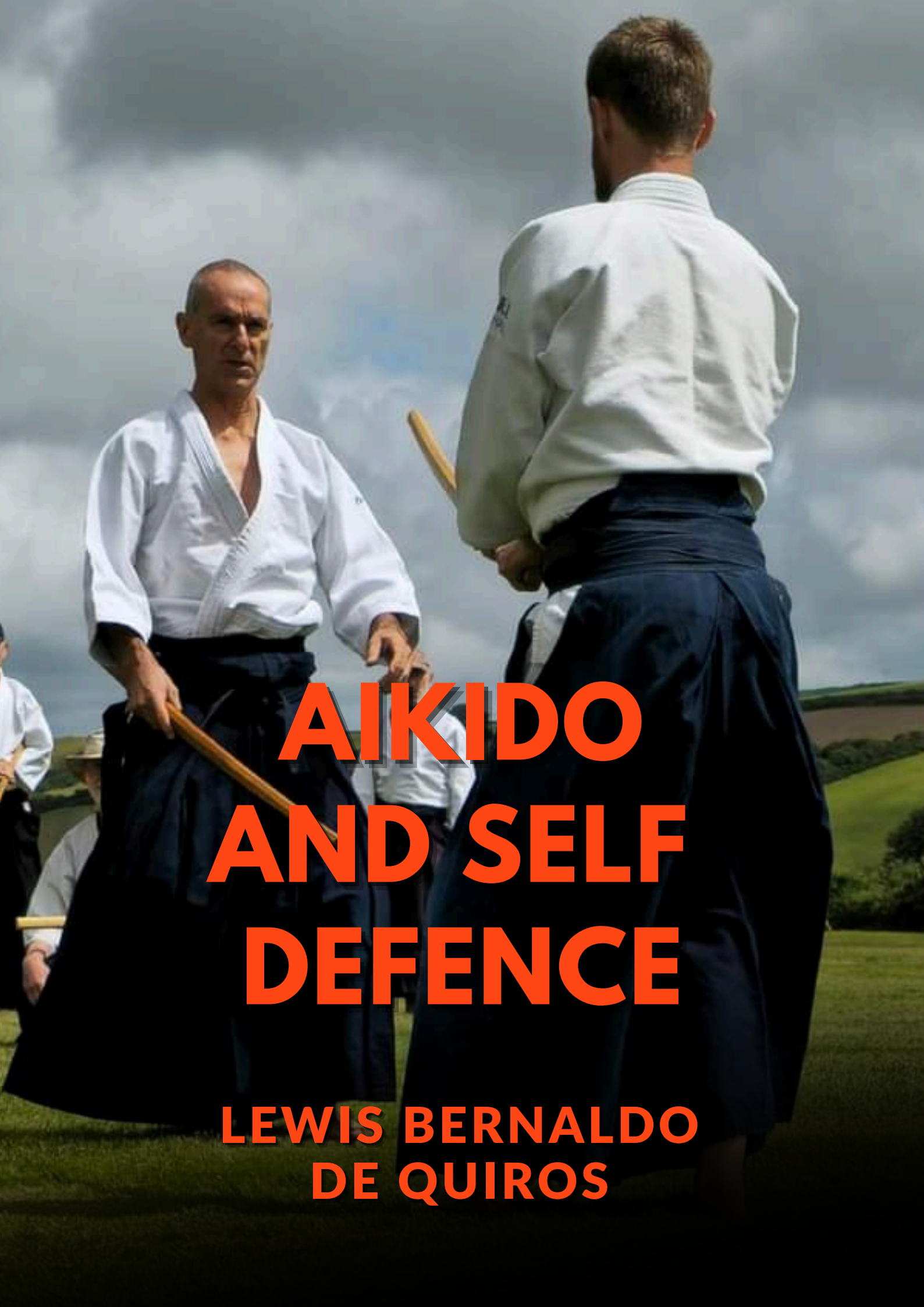
I think, this is not only nice, but also smart. Apart from values considerations, there is a simple strategic element in my reasoning: If I visualize a dangerous situation, like being attacked with a knife, I am sure that my chances of survival are higher if I run away or surrender than if I apply martial arts skills, no matter how experienced I am. I wouldn't last long on violent streets, that's for sure. This might be different for other martial artists and physically strong people. Their chances to survive might be higher, still there is no guaranty. There always will be someone stronger and more skilled. That is why I believe it is wiser and if not safe, so still safer, to practice strong, confident calmness instead of killing techniques.

Again, I'm not saying self-defense is wrong or that I don't understand the impulse to fight back. What I say is, it's not necessarily smart to do so and its, for sure, not what I want to focus on Aikido mats by summoning hypothetical dangerous street encounters. Even if bad guys do exist and might attack me one day, they don't represent the majority of real-life situations I want to use Aikido for. In my experience, compassionate connection and calming techniques are highly effective, and that's where I prefer to improve my practice.



**"The Art of Peace
begins with you.
Foster peace in your
own life and then
apply the Art to all
that you encounter."**

- Morihei Ueshiba

A photograph of two men in Aikido uniforms (white gi and dark blue hakama) practicing outdoors on a grassy field. The man on the left is facing the camera, holding a wooden bokken (practice sword) in his right hand. The man on the right is seen from the back, also holding a bokken. The background shows a cloudy sky and rolling green hills. The title text is overlaid in the center.

AIKIDO AND SELF DEFENCE

**LEWIS BERNALDO
DE QUIROS**

This article is part one of three exploring the self defence application of Aikido. Part 1 will explore the most important aspect in my opinion which is the the issue of awareness through the Cooper Colour Code System. Part 2 will expand on other factors of importance giving a broader context to the topic. Part 3 will consist of short interviews with experienced aikidoka in the community who because of their jobs or just (unfortunate) experience have encountered conflict situations. The question for them was how did they feel their training influenced the encounter.

Part 1: Zanshin

The question of how practicing a traditional martial art such as Aikido relates to and empowers one's safety on the street and in the general environment often comes up in discussion circles. These however tend to have their main focus on the effectiveness (or not) of the technical side of the arts, but in my opinion, this aspect although important, is actually quite secondary.

When I trained Karate under the late Keinosuke Enoeda (Shotokan 9th dan) I once ran into him by accident at the Japanese Bookshop in London. In those days self defence and fighting were topics uppermost in my mind so I took the opportunity to ask him the question that I had been mulling over for a while: in self defence what is the most important aspect? His answer was short and clear: Zanshin.

This term is best translated as 'remaining mind' or as we would call it 'peripheral awareness'. His answer asserts that in any encounter the mental aspect is the most important, a conviction shared with many other teachers who prioritise mind over technique. So in this essay I would like to address what I consider is the most important aspect of self defence in any situation, namely one's state of mind.

All teachers and practitioners I have spoken with about this topic since agree on the importance of awareness and mental attitude when dealing with any stressful situation. But the specifics as to what is meant and how to develop this aspect tend to remain somewhat vague and theoretical.

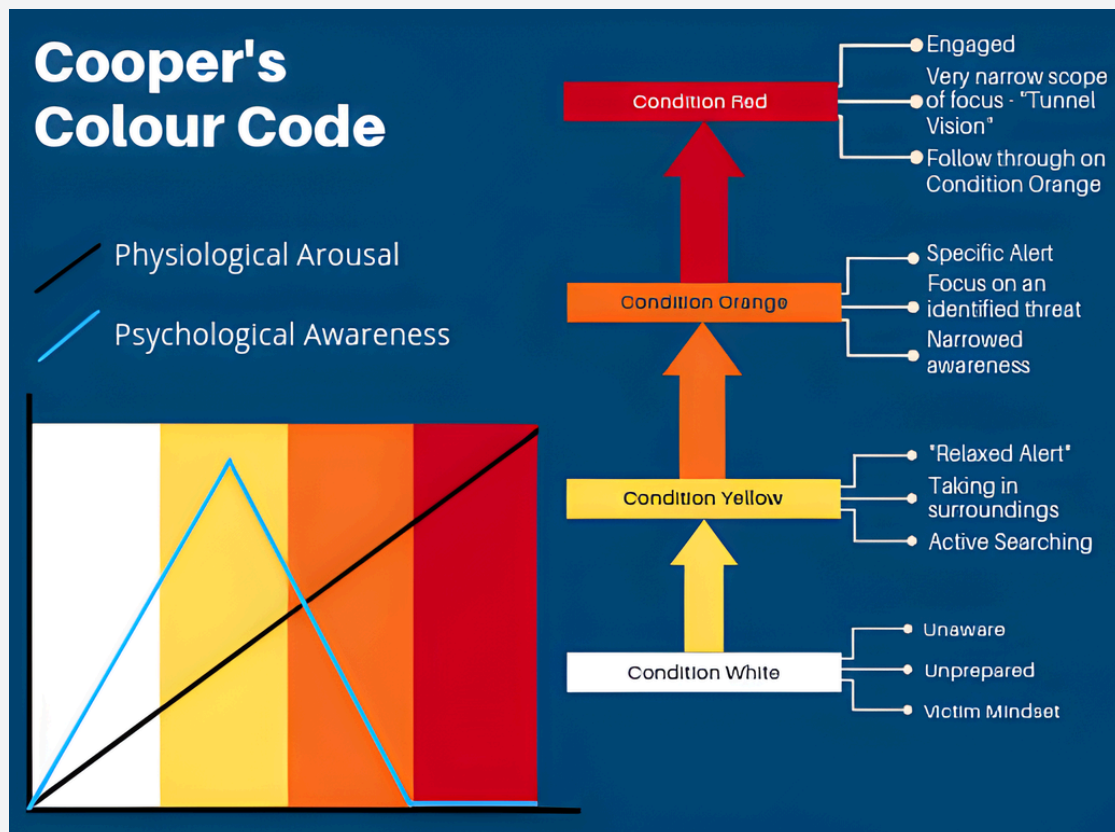


Keinosuke Enoeda, 1935 – 2003

Conversely, one system that I find very clear and practical on this topic is an extension of the Cooper Colour Code system. This system was developed by Jeff Cooper (deceased 2006) an American ex marine and weapons expert and originally, the colours where not descriptors for levels of alertness, but for escalating degrees of preparation for the use of a weapon. For Cooper, in agreement with most martial artists, in any lethal confrontation neither martial skills nor weapons are the most important thing: the mindset is always primary.

The following will elaborate and extend on this system as a map of levels of alertness. Cooper's four colours are as follows.

Coopers four Colours: a Dynamic Map of Levels of Alertness.



(Source: <https://www.aylesburykarate.co.uk/why-i-love-cooper-s-colour-code>, retrieved Nov 13, 2025)

White: Unaware and unprepared

In this state you are disconnected and distracted from your surrounding environment, unaware of what is going on around you. Sitting on a park bench reading a newspaper, walking down the street lost in thought or chatting animatedly with a friend, jogging with headphones on and of course worst of all, lost in your mobile phone whether walking or sitting with it.

Next time you are able to, sit and watch people walking by on a busy street in any city. The majority are in code white, essentially oblivious to their surroundings. While for most this is the dominant state, it is a state of vulnerability. Should a dangerous situation arise they will be caught by surprise and as any martial artist knows, if you are able to catch your opponent off guard the fight is 80% won.

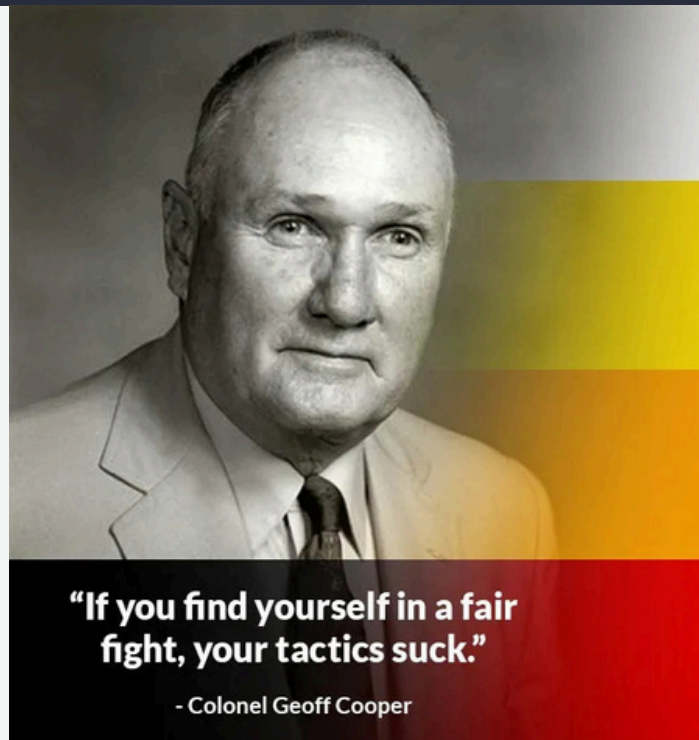
Yellow: Relaxed and alert

When on the move whether in a city or in nature this should be your basic state. It is a natural state of engagement with your surroundings. Posture is good, hands are free, head is upright and your attention is primarily engaged with the information coming from all the senses. Even if talking with a friend or paying attention to something of interest, peripheral awareness of your situation does not collapse. It is a state of interest in your environment and your perceptual experience.

Orange: Alert to potential threat

You shift to orange when something anomalous catches your attention. Body language that seems 'off'. An individual loitering in an area for no obvious reason, someone staring at you intently from a distance, noise from an altercation in a bar nearby. Police sirens all heading in the same direction, screeching of tires in a car park...

When anything signalling potential danger catches our attention even if it is just a 'gut feeling', our attention narrows to study and gather more information with two active streams in mind: First take evasive action looking for exits from the scene or ways of opening up distance. Second, run through plan scenarios: if this happens you will do this, if that happens you will do that, etc. Although it is rightly said that 'No battle plan survives contact with the enemy' (or as Mike Tyson more pithily put it: 'Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the face') what is important on this point is that you are preparing to take action by running quickly through options even if what you actually do should the need arise, be something completely different. In shifting into state orange stay calm and maintain background peripheral awareness, dispassionately evaluating the situation while increasing your state of preparedness and intention to act.

**Red: Flight or fight**

In code red the individual who was staring at you intently is crossing the street with clear intent to intercept, the person with odd body language has drawn a weapon in public, the gang loitering on the corner is shouting and moving in your direction, someone is trying to get into your car...

In these situations the potential danger has turned into an actual threat to your person. Your first priority is to escape, make lots of noise, if possible call the police, and if escape is not possible and all forms of evasion, de-escalation and neutralisation are not possible, then attack pre-emptively. The main point about this state is that you will not be taken by surprise. In orange you will have already assessed and made a plan creating the intention to act. In red, if escape is not possible, you should be ready and determined to carry through whatever is necessary to get home safely.

How Aikido training influences actions in code red when physical confrontation becomes unavoidable will be the topic of Part 3 of this essay.

The whole point of this system is to avoid codes white and red by making yellow your default and the shift into orange and back natural and fluid. Neither of these middle states are about paranoia.

They are actually about being present and responsive to our actual situational experience and not getting lost in 'our heads' (or phones!) in our daily lives. This does not mean that we should not use our phones or ever allow ourselves to daydream or hyper focus on some mental problem. But we need to choose the time and place for these activities. Thus we need to train our:

Situational and locational awareness

Situational awareness

This is the perception, comprehension and projection of one's immediate environment. It is a state of participation with one's ongoing immediate experience where attention shifts freely between a wide, relaxed, peripheral open focus (yellow) and moments of narrowed intensified focus (orange) as events or objects of interest capture one's attention.

Locational awareness

This refers to the conceptual 'map' one has as to one's location beyond what can be situationally perceived. For example, when in a movie theatre multiple exits are available. Some lead to empty backstreets and others to busy thoroughfares. Knowing this can be an important information when deciding which exit to take. The same goes for neighbourhoods and city areas: Where are areas of more or less safety depending on what time of day it is?

Real-Life Example

Let me illustrate the above points (colour codes and types of awareness) with an incident that occurred to me this very morning, when returning to my van in an open air carpark. As I was opening the door suddenly someone calls me from behind. I see a car parked right behind mine blocking my exit when other spaces were free. A man from inside the car is gesturing to me to approach. I turn around and check the vicinity. No one else that I can see. I put my back pack with valuables in the cabin and close the door locking the van. I approach the man who gestures me to look into his car through the open window. I keep my distance and speak to him from about a meter from the car door, keeping him and my surroundings in sight and my long ignition car key in hand.

'Parla italiano?' he asks. No, but I can understand it well enough, and I let him know he can continue in Italian. 'Is there a problem?'

'I am a truck driver and have just finished a delivery and have some left over items that may interest you. Your Italian is very good. Where are you from?'

'From here'.

'Let me show you what I have'.

OK, I get it: stolen goods. The guy in his thirties, medium heavy build. Right handed. Looks fit. Focused. I am definitely on alert now as I am alone in the carpark, as far as I can see. I come closer and check out the luxury watches on display in the passenger seat to give myself a bit more time to evaluate while he is busy talking and pulling out boxes. Time to leave.

'No thanks. I am not interested'. The man scowls and waves me off. I back away turning towards my van door and get in without wasting any time. As I start my motor, he drives off fast. I leave taking a different exit.

End of incident.

I must admit that at the moment he drove up, I had let my situational awareness – code Yellow – drop, as I had focused on getting into my van. I neither noticed another car in the carpark in motion nor heard him approach and stop. I had gone to code White; that was a serious lapse. Finding myself ‘trapped’ I shifted directly to orange and engaged. Maybe he just needed some assistance? Having quickly assessed what was going on, my mind shifted to measuring distances and times, plus running scenarios: ‘If he gets out of the car...’ ‘If another person approaches...’ etc). At the same time I was keeping my situational awareness wide and engaging the man.

This story illustrates how any incident can be used as a training opportunity!

**Relaxed and
completely unaware**

**Relaxed but aware minimal
acceptable level when in
public or carrying a firearm**

**Potential threat identified,
attempt to verify,
evade if necessary**

**Threat verified,
execute necessary response**

Urban Jungle Survival Tips

These ‘tips’ are meant to support your ability to stay primarily in code yellow and shift to orange easily as circumstances dictate:

- Wear loose comfortable clothing which allows full mobility.
- Wear non slip flexible shoes (high heels not practical. Bad for posture and mobility).
- Keep mobile and all valuables secure in a safe back pack allowing hands to remain free.
- In areas of high risk (eg downtown Barcelona which has a very high number of pickpockets operating alone and in teams) consider a dummy mobile and wallet while securing all valuables in a secondary location.
- Remain acutely aware of spatial relationships. Walk down the centre of the pavement, walk wide around corners, use window reflections and car side mirrors to check on your six and preferably walk facing incoming traffic.
- In cafe’s and restaurants sit with a good view of the whole area with your back to a wall.
- Approach your car with keys already in hand.
- Do not stand out. Be inconspicuous.
- Don’t hurry (or rather ‘make haste slowly’) Give yourself margin in terms of time and space.
- Preferably walk with another person.
- Be responsible with alcohol.

The Art of Attention: Reigi as the heart of martial arts practice

Japanese traditional martial arts in general have a strong ethos of etiquette and behavioural norms surrounding and embracing their practice. How one enters the Dojo, how one behaves in the changing room, where one leaves one's belongings and weapons, the cleaning before and after and the bowing before during and after training. All is highly codified. When I was in Iwama at first I found it all rather suffocating. I could understand and accept the necessity of being respectful and attentive at all times but a lot of the etiquette and rules for everything just seemed excessive. However at one point Sensei (Morihiro Saito) mentioned in passing:

'A polite person is an attentive person'

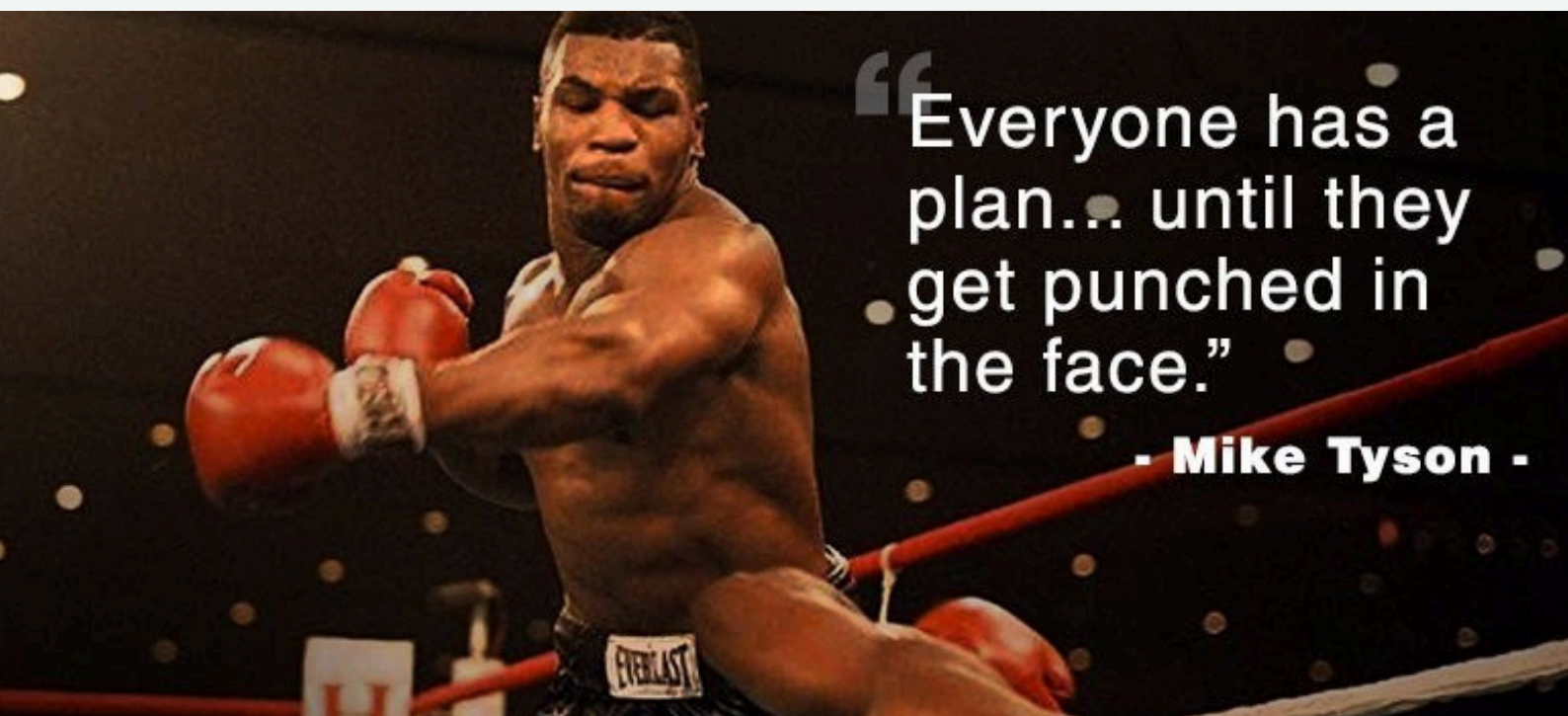
And it all somehow fell into place. Reigi is beyond politeness norms a form of training one's attention into the present. Training in martial arts is not just about learning martial technique but is primarily about learning to pay attention and be present with the ongoing dynamic flow of experience.

On the mat in training we are training the body, our energy and our minds. In this last we do not drop our awareness of our partner(s) and contact with them at any time, we do not talk unnecessarily and we remain aware of our surroundings: **Zanshin**. When the instructor teaches, we pay full attention and do not lean against a wall, cross our arms or take time out.

We practice presence at all times.

This training will serve us well on the street and in daily life. Code yellow is essentially Zanshin. The same calm aware state of mind we aim to cultivate in the dojo as a primary aspect of our training without which the other aspects (physical and energetic) will remain empty and mechanical instead of alive and vital.

Ultimately training in a traditional martial art is a way of life, the effects and benefits of which are felt in all areas of one's life. The training not only conditions the body, but also makes us more aware of posture, of being grounded and centred. The calm and stable mental state we seek should transfer to our daily lives.



“Everyone has a plan... until they get punched in the face.”

- Mike Tyson -



This traditional story [1] illustrates all of the points touched upon above:

Among Bokuden Tsukahara's students (a famous 16th century sword master) there was a man of extraordinary technical skill. While walking down the street, this disciple passed a skittish horse that suddenly kicked at him, but he deftly turned his body to avoid the kick and escaped injury.

Bystanders who witnessed the event said, "He well deserves being called one of Bokuden's top disciples. Bokuden will surely pass his secrets on to him, if to no one else".

But when Bokuden heard of the incident he was disappointed and said, "I've misjudged him", then expelled the student from the school.

People could not understand Bokuden's reasoning and decided that nothing could be done but observe how Bokuden himself would behave in similar circumstances.

In order to do this, they hitched an exceedingly ill-tempered horse to a wagon on a road which they knew Bokuden would pass.

Secretly watching him from a distance, they were surprised to see Bokuden give the horse a wide birth by crossing to the far side of the road.

They were caught off guard at this unexpected outcome, and later, confessing their ruse, they asked the reason for Bokuden's dismissal of the disciple.

Bokuden replied, "A person with a mental attitude that allows him to walk carelessly by a horse without considering that it may rear up is a lost cause no matter how much he may study technique. I thought he was a person of better judgement, but I was mistaken.

[1] Quoted from: The Twenty Guiding Principles of Karate. Gichin Funakoshi

A photograph of a man in a white karate gi with a black belt, performing a technique on a partner who is lying on the floor. The man is in a dynamic pose, with his arms extended and hands near the partner's head. The background shows a brick wall with a calligraphy scroll, a small framed photo, and a wooden bench. The floor is a blue and grey mat.

HOW TO USE PRINCIPLES TO IMPROVE TRAINING QUALITY

TOMAS NORD

In the past I have written about how useful I find it to reflect on how to learn effectively. This can very much help in not just making the training fun but also assuring good progress and development. One of the topics I often come back to is the difference between whether you are practicing the forms in the curriculum or if you are using them. This might seem like only a slight wording difference, however, the difference is quite large. In the first case the goal of the training would (hypothetically) be to learn the forms, or maybe even as many forms as possible since it might get boring after a while to not have new ones to learn. In the second case the forms would be a tool to learn something. One obvious follow up question would be: "to learn what"? The good news is that there is a whole section in the curriculum that describes this, which I would also call: "the key section of the curriculum". To quote the starting piece of text from it: "The Syllabus can be understood as both a roadmap to acquiring the basic techniques and as a check on one's level of progress in the understanding and embodiment of the Principles of Aikido." The first part of this sentence means that there is a pedagogical plan embodied in the set of techniques chosen for each level. The second part of the sentence points to the purpose of the use of the forms, i.e., the understanding and embodiment of the principles.

Technique, Form, Principle

It might be good here to pause and look at the used terms. I use the word "technique" for the relatively narrow functional and technical aspect that uniquely identifies what is happening in uke. This means we can distinguish ikkyo from nikkyo, but it does not say anything about how it is applied. I think of the word "forms" in the curriculum, however, as small partner katas with predefined roles for uke and nage. Gyaku hanmi katate dori ikkyo omote waza is a multi-step partner kata which provides an example of how the technique ikkyo can

appear in a certain situation. It should also be trained as a kata, i.e., uke and nage performing the kata together. Here I use "form" and "kata" interchangeably, but distinguish them from "technique".

Now back to the principles. The principles are the essential characteristics of the system. The forms in the curriculum are examples of applications of the principles in given situations. The pedagogical idea is that the forms should be descriptive and clear enough to put you close enough to what you would do if you had embodied the principles, and in this way hopefully give you as good a chance as possible to gain an experience of the principle in action instead of as a purely technical execution of a form.

From Abstraction to Practice

A next question could be: "If this now is the pedagogical idea, what does it actually mean for my day to day training? This whole stuff seems very abstract.". To make it practical: avoid empty training, i.e., just mindlessly repeating forms without a purpose. Instead, use as much as possible of your current knowledge of the principles to guide you into improving how to execute the forms. If you, for instance, notice problems with balance, maybe pick a body use principle you are aware of, such as weight underneath (relaxed centered heaviness) and focus on what this principle tells you about how it should feel at each point in the form. Break the form down into parts where you can stop, gauge the quality of your embodiment of the principle, correct yourself, and then move to the next stop. Feel free to be creative.

"The goal is not the form. The form is the tool."

This kind of mindful training will in the long run beat out "end-gaining" type of training where you just focus on finalising the execution of the technique by any means necessary in order to get the partner to the floor.

Finding the Principles to Work With

Next question then: "How do I know which principles there are to pick from?". This is a good question, since there is a circular loop in that we gain knowledge of the principles through training the forms and we use our understanding of the principles to improve the quality of the training. The good news is again that "the key section of the curriculum" actually mentions the most important ones to focus on and at what stage in the learning development to do so.

For basic practice I think it can be a useful starting point to work with 3 main groups of principles: body use principles, time and distance principles, and functional principles. For more advanced training there can be more groups or different ways to slice and dice principles, but let's leave that out for the moment. For the pedagogical levels I tend to simplify it to:

- **6 Kyu to 1 Dan** - focus on basic form learning with a broad brush focus on functional and body use principles. This prepares you to be able to train in a much deeper way at shodan and above.
- **1 Dan to 2 Dan** - focus very little on forms and instead deep dive into body use principles. An improvement in the quality of body use (i.e., better embodiment of the body use principles) is what takes you from katai to yawarakai. This is especially related to improving "functional grounding", "centered coordination", "power through extension", and "connecting to the partner's center". As the embodiment of these improves you use less upper body tension movements (such as pulling, etc.) but rely more on the centered and grounded weight of the body to be behind and extended into the contact points with the partner. When the techniques are performed by more relying on this refined use of the body it will look smoother, mainly because your whole body weight cannot "jerk" around as it might when relying on upper-body strength pulling or pushing your partner.
- **2 Dan to 3 Dan** - deep dive into time and distance principles. This is where the partner starts to become more of the focus. The body use developed above now needs to be maintained while moving, and that motion needs to be in relation to a moving partner, i.e., "distance", "timing", and "connection" become the development points.
- **3 Dan to 4 Dan** - deep dive into functional principles. Here the game of the partner is stepped up. Explore through counter techniques, variations, and applied techniques, the principles of what makes the techniques work or fail.

Function, Body Use and Timing

Functional principles describe what makes a technique succeed or fail. These principles involve aspects such as identifying the directions in which a partner's base is strong or weak, disturbing the center (i.e., the ability to coordinate the body), or the partner, misleading them, or denying them access to power from the ground. This is a large and complex topic that deserves its own article. While the following principles also have functional aspects, distinguishing purely functional principles for pedagogical purposes allows them to be introduced and developed earlier in training.

Body use principles can be one of the hardest things to change or improve in training. I think this is because during our whole lives we pick up various body use habits and along the way most of us pick up some bad ones, which get ingrained through daily use. These bad habits tend to be what feels right, and any change for the better has a hurdle of feeling wrong to get over. Even though body use is a very large topic that can be sliced and diced into a large number of principles, I find that starting with three that are very central to the style can make a big difference: "functional grounding", "power through extension", and "centering". Functional grounding, or to make a car analogy, the "quality of the suspension", here refers to the ability to have the weight of the body (and potentially the power of a partner) go to the ground in a functional way. Power through extension refers

to the way we transmit power from the ground through the body, and especially how we transmit it into the contact points with the training partner. Centering refers to the idea that all of this is coordinated from the center. The center has to have a functional connection to the ground, and power through extension refers to extension from the center.

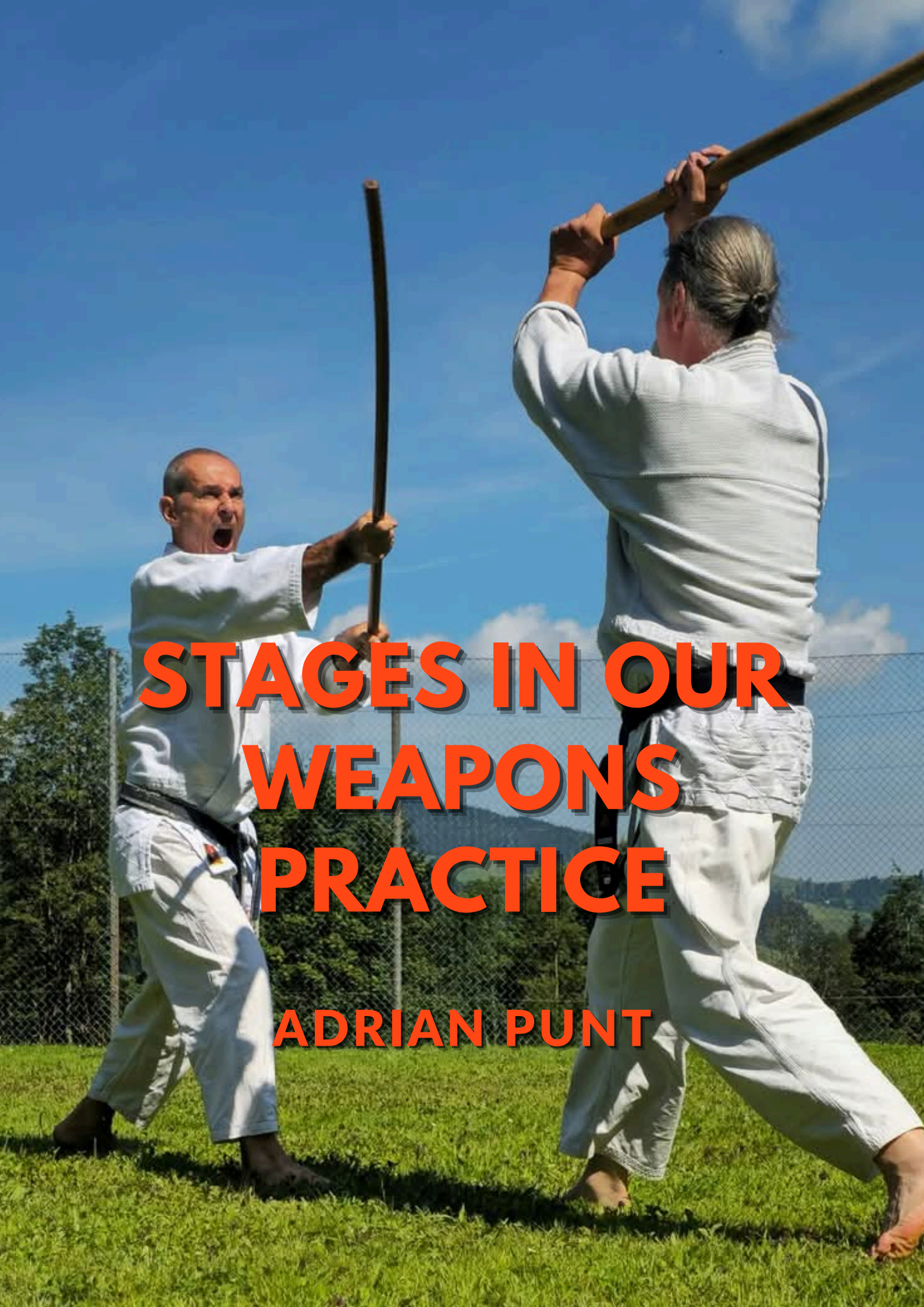
There are many ways of training body use principles. One of my favourite solo exercise tools is the swinging arms exercise. Using the whole body to swing the arms (which should be 100% relaxed) is a great way of working on the grounding and the centering, and provides a very good setup for later working on power through extension. I often use a “pre-suburi” step-by-step practice to build up to bokken practice, however, sharing that will have to wait for a separate article.

Distance and timing principles relate to where and when you should be. Note that this can be either “inside” a technique, i.e., where to be in each step of the technique and the timing of these steps, or in a bigger sense in relation to your partner as an attack is happening. If you relate back to the discussion on technique vs kata above, you can see this as there being timing both on the level of technique and on the level of kata. While practicing techniques, begin by focusing on distance, that is, consider where you need to be. Get into the habit of moving yourself to the place you should be during training rather than using extra strength to pull the partner as a compensation for not being in a good place. If needed, break the technique down into steps and make sure you are in the right place at each step of the way. Once you can chain the steps consistently being in the right place you can add the “timing” aspect of connecting each of the steps. Try to notice how the partner reacts to leaving different sized gaps between each step of the technique. This also overlaps with the “functional” principles and is important to make the techniques work well. There is a certain “rhythm” to how a body reacts to your techniques.

The Split-Second Sequence: Align, Center, Extend

When practicing forms in motion you need to have the technique related timing and distance in good shape. You will also need to have the body use principles in good order, which is where it often gets difficult. Part of the timing necessary for nagare work relates to body use principles happening in a certain order and with the required speed. In general when an attack happens you will have to 1) align your body and find grounding, 2) move your center to be “behind” the direction you are extending your partner, and 3) mobilize power through extension. This sounds like a long affair, however, it needs to happen in a split second. “1, 2, 3” in almost one go. For instance, if you are training tai-no-henko in nagare form, you first need to find the ground close to the partner’s front foot with your foot already partly rotated. You then need to have the freedom of body use to have your center move past the point where your hand is grabbed (without moving it). This almost has a feeling of “rolling” over the partner’s hand. This is not possible with a stiff body. Then you need to apply the power through extension in the direction you were attacked. Finally you can change the direction of the extension from your center to lead the partner in a new direction. If you skip 1) above you have no ground to get power from. If you skip 2) above and turn in front of where you are grabbed you cannot use power through extension. This would create a collision with the partner. Instead you would have to use tension in the arm, shoulder, and upper chest to “pull” the partner. These two ways of doing the form might look very similar, especially in motion, however, on the inside they are completely different.

I hope that you might find some of these thoughts interesting or something to come back to during your own training. Do you know some principles and do you use them when you train? As always, have fun while training.

A photograph of two martial artists in white uniforms practicing with wooden weapons in a grassy field. The artist on the left is holding a long, thin wooden staff vertically, with his mouth open in a shout. The artist on the right is holding a longer, thicker wooden staff horizontally, with both hands raised above their head. The background shows a chain-link fence, trees, and a clear blue sky with some clouds.

STAGES IN OUR WEAPONS PRACTICE

ADRIAN PUNT



Stage 1

Firstly, for us, tai jutsu, bokken work, and jo work are all one unified system of body movement. These aspects of our practice are not separate, disparate systems, but one coordinated whole. In this system we seek to teach our body to bend, to flex, to move in spirals, to move in very specific ways. The body is the tool, the real weapon; the forms we practice in Aikido are there to teach us how to use our body in a martial context.

In our practice, it is through solo weapons work that we refine our structure, our balance, pose, poise and posture, our ability to move from the center, our extension, our grounding and weight underside. We also work on our attention, our focus, our intention. We seek mental clarity whilst also maintaining the concept of 'beginners mind', of approaching everything with the intention of making it better.

Through seemingly simple exercises (suburi) we explore multiple aspects of body and mind in movement and stillness – and the transition from one to the other. We are looking to 'find the feeling', to recruit specific muscle groups, to develop both strength and stability in our bodies along with mobility and flexibility. The more we practice the more we come to understand that these are not simple exercises that are there to be copied and repeated, but complex and multidimensional things. Each suburi exercise is a 'lesson', each aims to build and refine our mental and physical form, each, even in the basic form, offers multiple layers of complexity that can be explored.

So, we could call solo weapons practice, the suburi we practice, *Stage 1*, it is establishing the foundations – perhaps the most critical aspect of any construction project. In this, we can include the linking of various solo suburi exercises into a sequence, into a kata. Here we start to explore the components of body mechanics, and mind and body coordination, as discussed above, with a broader range of transitions from one body form / geometry to another.

Stage 2

At the next stage, *Stage 2*, in our weapons practice, we engage with a partner. We start with single attacks in an agreed format; we respond with a single movement. Left, right, high, low, thrust, strike; in each instance we work on the blend, on the awase – the exploration of both timing and distance. Through the use of the bokken and jo we explore not just different attacks, but also different distances and timings.

In partnered awase work, our partner seeks to transition from stillness to movement, to launch their attack without tell-tell signs. We seek to read, to feel their intention and move as they move. We seek not to respond / react to their movement, but to 'read' their intention and to move as they move, and to move in a controlled and coordinated way as we learned in the suburi. Two parties, two weapons, but one movement, starting and finishing together. As we become better at perceiving our partner's intention to move, we may choose to delay our movement, we wait in stillness, tracking the incoming strike. Then when our partner is fully committed in their attack, we respond decisively.

In kihon practice we link various move-counter-move sequences together in a blend-pause-blend-pause way. At each point there is an agreement over who initiates and who has to try and blend. Roles reverse between these points and the concept of uke and nage evolves into more of a partnership. At this stage each party has equal responsibility to try and find the perfect blend. Together, without pressure, we seek to build our understanding of the way of harmony.

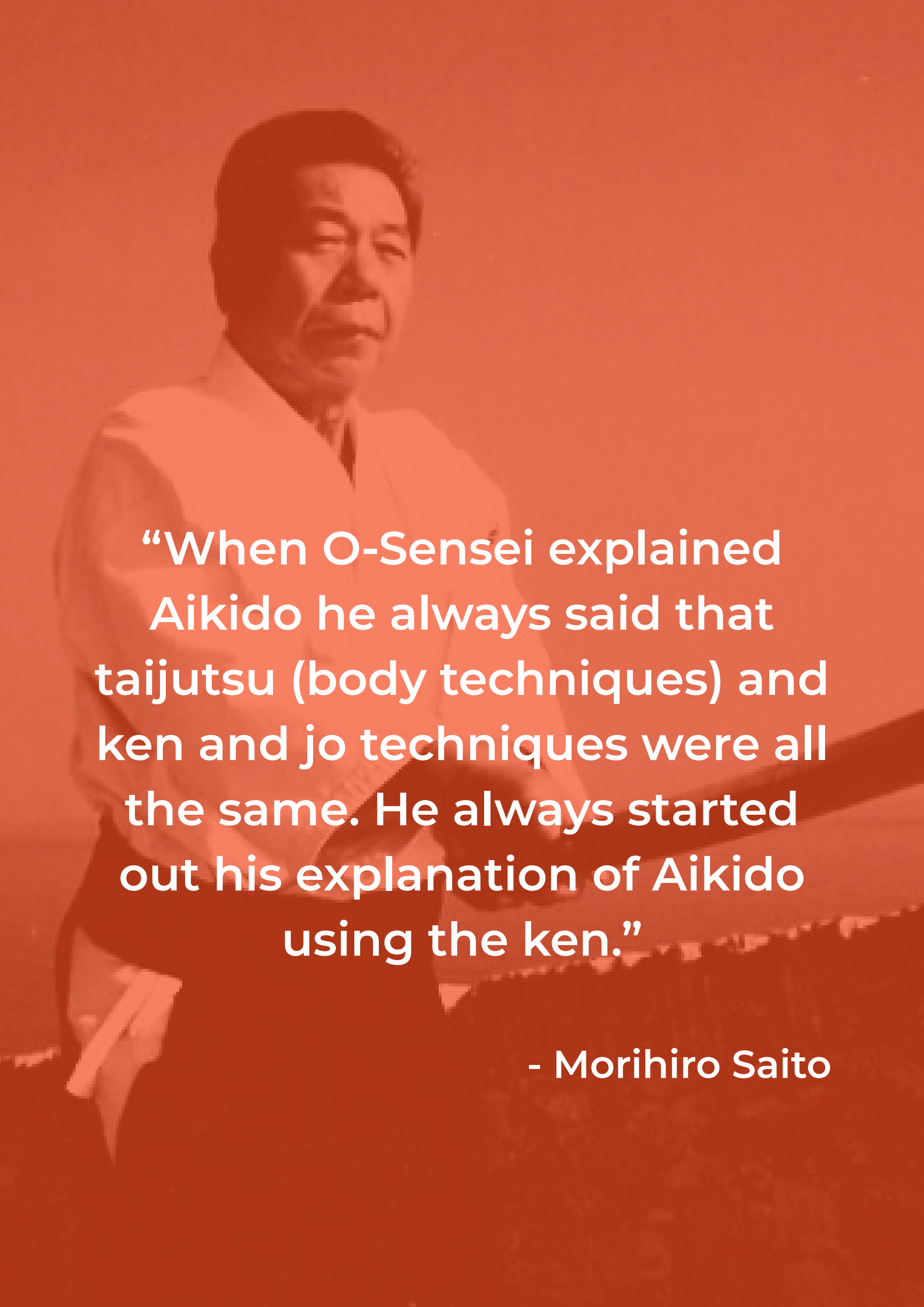


Stage 3

At *Stage 3* the intention, the energy changes. The concept of joint, mutual responsibility, in terms of awase, of blending disappears. Whether bokken strike to the head, or jo thrust to the body or strike to the knee, our partner's intent is to attack. Our weapons are solid and hard, attacks are strong and committed, we are not wearing any protection. Our partner should attack at a pace that is within their ability to stop and within their partner's ability to respond, but it should still be delivered with intent.

At this stage, we start in kihon, firstly learning to deal with manageable 'bursts' of movement, with a pause in-between to reset and evaluate. Then we move into ki no nagare. In ki no nagare, there are no pauses, footwork changes, the attack is continuous, the response continuous. We receive the attack, parry, guard, counter, then finish. We can work with the full form or choose to finish the encounter early

The system is broad and deep, but also accessible. Beginner and experienced practitioner can work together, but they are accessing and exploring different stages.



**“When O-Sensei explained
Aikido he always said that
taijutsu (body techniques) and
ken and jo techniques were all
the same. He always started
out his explanation of Aikido
using the ken.”**

- Morihiro Saito



DOJO PORTRAIT:
TAKEMUSU AIKIDO DEN HAAG,
SPONAAR DOJO

PAUL LIPMAN



Beginning

In the mid-1960s, aikido was introduced to the Netherlands by the judoka Peter Beljaars. In the early 1970s, the study group Circle Bushido was founded in The Hague. They had converted a small shop into a dojo and practiced aikido using books as their guide. One of the pioneers on that tiny tatami was Nico Kroon, originally also a judoka. Gradually, aikido was practiced by a growing community. This gained momentum when Doshu Kisshomaru Ueshiba was invited to The Hague for a seminar, and Nobuyoshi Tamura, a direct student of Morihei Ueshiba and technical director of Hombu in Europe, came to give his first seminar in the Netherlands. This marked the beginning of the professional development of aikido in the Netherlands.

In 1982, Nico Kroon decided to start his own dojo to teach aikido. He named it Sponaar, short for "sport naast arbeid" ("sport alongside work"). This fit perfectly with the post-World War II Dutch reconstruction mindset: hard work was the ethos, and sport was seen as essential for a healthy life. Nico Kroon joined the Budo/Judo Bond Nederland (BBN/JBN) with Tamura Shihan as head instructor, who came to the Netherlands monthly to teach seminars. Thus, Nico Kroon followed the Aikikai style and, through BBN/JBN, was connected with Hombu Dojo in Japan.

Transition

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, other teachers took over from Nico Kroon. One of them was Raimond Dittmar. Around 2004, Raimond and two Sponaar sempai, Nico Laterveer and Paul Lipman, began attending seminars by Daniel Toutain in France and Belgium, where they encountered Iwama Ryu. After several periods as uchi deshi with Daniel Toutain, the inevitable decision followed: the dojo would make a transition from Aikikai to Takemusu Aikido. The change became official in 2006, with Raimond, Nico, and Paul as instructors.



This had a major impact on the dojo. Many members left or stopped practicing aikido, because they didn't want or were unable to make the change. Meanwhile, contact had been established with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros and the group in the Netherlands practicing the same style. Lewis came to The Hague every month to teach. The instructors and some students took private lessons with Lewis and participated in seminars frequently.

The dojo's name was changed to Takemusu Aikido Den Haag, Sponaar Dojo. "Sponaar" remained part of the name out of respect for the founder Nico Kroon and the dojo's evolution. Eventually, the logo was refreshed as well, featuring the theme of the constant wave motion between yin (reception) and yang (projection), themes that are very applicable to both aikido and the dojo itself.

Coming of Age

And here we are — nearly 45 years after Sponaar's founding. Now a mature and established Takemusu dojo with a stable membership of around 15 aikidoka, led by instructors Paul Lipman and Frodo Schering. An important part of our mission is to preserve and pass on this style. But an equally important challenge is to place aikido in the here and now. How do we keep aikido relevant and current? There's no simple answer to that.

What we do believe is that in a time when people seem to lose cohesion and grounding, aikido can help us reconnect with the basics and the balance needed to truly connect with each other again. That's why at Takemusu Aikido Den Haag, we cultivate a warm, relaxed atmosphere in which everyone can be themselves. Every five years, we celebrate our dojo's anniversary extensively, and at least twice a year we gather for drinks and barbecue.

We also try to contribute to the ongoing development of aikido. Within the system, we use creative approaches such as gaming, playing and improvising. We also seek to broaden our understanding of aikido principles and elements by exploring other martial arts. Over the years, we've organized guest classes with other aikido styles and budo disciplines such as Aikibudo, Yoseikan Jujutsu, Katori Shinto Ryu, judo, kickboxing, Systema and kendo. Our goal is to learn from different perspectives on key aikido concepts such as weapon work, tsuki and atemi, kuzushi, groundwork, grips and short-distance combat. Not only enjoyable — but also very valuable.

Looking back, it has been quite a journey so far. Exploring, making choices, dealing with the consequences, persevering and staying in good spirits — aikido in real life — it all brought us to where we are today. From here, we will continue to develop and grow and follow our 'do'. It's wonderful that we are not alone in this. Both nationally and internationally, we have a warm and valuable network with all of you. We hope to see you soon!

Looking for more information?
Please visit www.sponaar.nl



Instructor Profiles

Paul Lipman

- Started aikido in: 1988
- Started teaching in: 2004
- Current degree: Yondan

Nice to know:

"I studied Public Administration and Executive Change Management. In my last thesis, I applied aikido as one of the perspectives on behavioral change in organizations and other systems. As a spin-off, I founded the company Aiki-connect, through which I help individuals and groups (re)discover their foundation and balance – both mentally and physically – and from there, connect with others. In this I apply aikido principles and use body-oriented exercises based on aikido."

If you're interested in more information, please visit www.aiki-connect.nl

Frodo Schering

- Started aikido in: 2004
- Started teaching in: 2018
- Current degree: Nidan

Nice to know:

"Even though aikido and the tech world might seem worlds apart, I try to incorporate aikido principles into my work as a digital designer. Approaching design challenges from a place of presence has always served me better than overanalyzing them. I also see parallels between aikido and design in concepts such as flow, balance, and harmony. I'm curious to keep exploring these connections further."





ELLIS AMDUR
- IMPRESSIONS FROM
A WEEKEND SEMINAR

ELLIE DENVIR
(WITH ADRIAN PUNT)



The decision to go to Ellis Amdur's seminar in London was one that I made fairly impulsively. Through a journal editors' meeting, my interest was piqued, I felt the call of a training adventure and had the chance to join a friend who had already booked a place.

Ellis Amdur trained in Aikido in the USA in 1973, and moved to Japan in 1976, where he lived for 13 years and focused his attention on training classic weapons forms Tenshin Bukō-ryū Heihō and Araki-ryū. He has written books on martial arts, such as 'Hidden in Plain Sight' and 'Dueling with O-Sensei', 3 novels and many books relating to crisis intervention. He also founded a methodology and training school for "verbal de-escalation of aggressive and mentally ill individuals".[1]

His, in traditional terms, controversial approach during his time in Japan, moving between traditional arts was surely a daring move, difficult to carry off without upsetting traditional sensei or confusing the arts.

In my last 14 years of training, I have worked within an ethos of concentrating progress through a single lineage of martial art inheritance. With TAE, this is put as 'training O-Sensei Morihei Ueshiba's Aikido as taught by the late Morihiro Saito Sensei', with our senior teachers, as Saito Sensei's students, having the role of communicating this through the training process. At my current point in Aikido life, I find this training to be like a container, which gives me a framework for deepening my understanding of the art and the mind-body. I'm not focusing on any grading at the moment, and have the gift of time to explore and relax into my development in Aikido. Approaching the Ellis Amdur seminar in London, I was intrigued about how I'd find ways to integrate what I would be taught with my practice.

[1] See the book review of TAE Journal Issue 13: 'Words of Power'



Travelling to London from the North West of England, we read about what we'd be doing over the weekend.

The focus would be Tenzan Heiho, kenjutsu and jo partnered ('five-shaku jo') forms, which Ellis Amdur and Bruce Bookman have created in collaboration. This is a weapons system of 5 partnered weapons kata - with both bokken-bokken and jo-jo forms. Each of the five forms has a bokken and jo form: while there are differences due to how the weapons are used, they are the 'same'. Each of the 5 kata forms explores different martial principles with the underpinning requirement that the individual moves in the kata should all be martially realistic; and at the end of the kata the uke and uchi roles have reversed, such that they could 'cycle' through the kata time after time. Each time, without pause or reset, roles are automatically reversed.

The training venue was a scouting hut, metal exterior, wooden interior. The wooden interior gave something of a traditional dojo feeling. The group gathered were mostly Aikidoka with over one or two decades of experience, mostly middle-age males, with a few notable exceptions. Out of around 25 participants, there were 3 of us who practise Iwamu-Ryu, all from TAE. Also present were people who practise traditional Japanese shinken work, and a competitive kendo practitioner.

On Saturday we explored the first jo kata; exploring the concept of working at distance. The sequence wasn't long, maybe 6 to 8 moves. We worked on the first move, then added the second, and so on. During the 4 hours of the Saturday we managed (just) to get to the end of the jo form of the first of the five forms. On the Sunday, we explored the first form in the bokken-bokken variation.



The teaching was step-by-step and methodical, breaking out specific sequences, down to single movements and repeating those - this included times of 'put the weapon aside and do the moves in a solo form' without a weapon. Ellis talked about the importance of repetition, of building the required neural pathways and dendron structure / clusters through repetition - both on and off the mat, whether waiting for the bus or a kettle to boil.

From his teaching over the weekend, I found specific interesting perspectives and threads to work into or around my aikido practice.

In terms of ken, Ellis noted that for some - whether ken jutsu or 'modern' Aikido, the stance is very upright with the ken straight out in front. However, in the old sword schools the footwork is more an off-placed hanmi, the stance is more crouched, the blade is angled - as that is simply the most economic geometry. Several times, Ellis referred to sumo and their stance, and that from



an 'old school' perspective where bodies may clash, upright bodies and also overly wide stances make no sense.

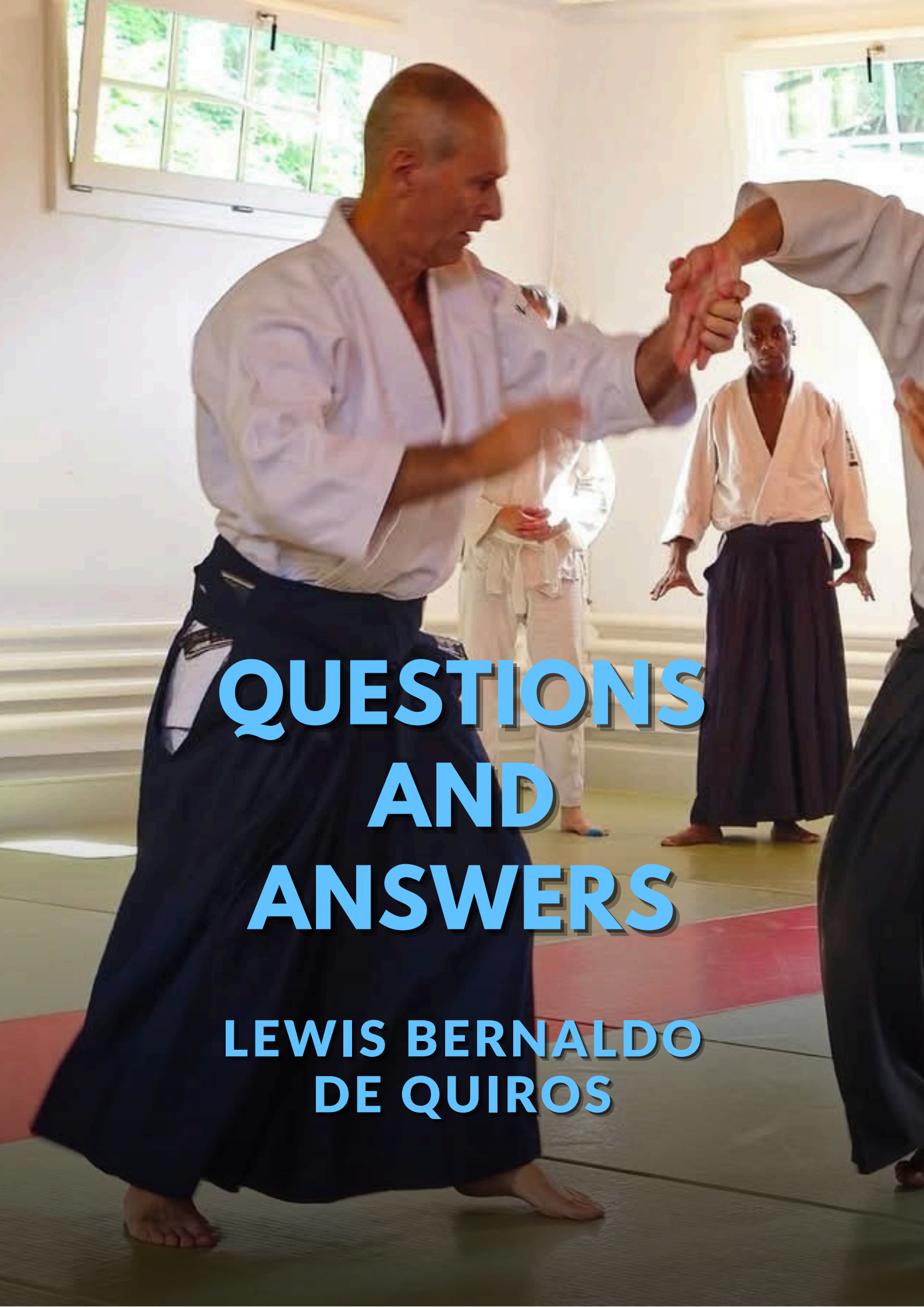
Use of the bokken was as if using a shinken. The most interesting part of my weekend's journey back into bokken-as-shinken was when Ellis' teaching related to use of the ground. In the first ken pair work he taught, we were encouraged to land weight heavily into the ground while stepping off line, making an upwards strike in yokomen. This was an explosive upwards dynamic with the weapon, whilst acquiring the ground, not just with sinking, but stamping. This use of ground is in some ways opposite to our Saito-Sensei-informed use of ground - to collect, draw in and combine ('accept, absorb, take control'). Attempting to practice the dynamic that Ellis was teaching meant looking at the principle of aligned ground-connection from a different perspective - an 'explosive' one.

How you move, not simply to where you move, was important. Ellis used the analogy of an octopus and its ability to spiral, morph, adjust, adapt, flex. In teaching the jo and bokken attacks and responses, he put a strong emphasis on adaptably shifting weight. Several times during the weekend, Ellis was heard to say 'Don't pivot, move your weight in, move your feet'. This is a further reminder note from the weekend: to focus on the shift of feet and weight which gives power to the hip turn and de-stabilises uke.

A repeating point from Ellis was, make a mental picture in your head, then let your sub-conscious work on how to deliver it. Watching the group's practice and noticing the lower body use, he asked 'Do you use the term 'wish-bone?'. He explained that while we were using the outer line of muscles in the legs, we also needed to engage the muscles of the inner legs with a 'wish-bone' feeling. Applying this idea gave me an improved sense of foot-knee-hip alignment.

During each of the half-day sessions, Ellis taught Baduanjin exercises - traditional Chinese breath and posture work exercises. After practising these, especially following the intense concentration we were putting into the weapons work training, a calmness settled over the whole group. Interestingly, access to videos of these exercises were what participants asked for the most at the end of the weekend.

In summary, attending the Ellis Amdur seminar was very valuable for me. No-one present had learned these forms before. One of Ellis' repeating points was that the kata are simply vehicles through which to explore principles of combative weapons work and body movement and particular biomechanical actions. I found much that I could bring home. While I am unlikely to train these katas, some things I can integrate into my practice are the use of new analogies and ideas, the use of shifting weight and wrap-around responsiveness, the use of imagination together with repetition for on and off the mat training, and especially, the Baduanjin exercises. As Ellis taught them, these bring breath, attention, body movement, extension and ground in a way that improves my practice and daily life.

A man in a white martial arts gi and dark blue hakama is performing a technique in a dojo. He is in a low, wide stance, with his right arm extended forward and his left arm bent. He is holding the hand of another person whose arm is visible on the right. In the background, another person in a white gi and dark blue hakama is standing and watching. The dojo has a light-colored floor with a red line and large windows in the background.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

LEWIS BERNALDO
DE QUIROS



1) Why are there only two Jo katas in Aikido? I got asked this in the kids class - they were a bit disappointed that soon they will already know both katas and there is no further one. Of course we started with the 6-count kata, then expanded to 8-count, including the hasso. Now we are working on the 31. But for many this is already a repetition and while they are still happy doing it, they are still astonished that there is only one more to go...

Good question from the kids! My opinion is that since Aikido is fundamentally relationally focused, the bulk of the system is oriented towards practice with a partner (levels 2 and 3). The only solo practice we have (level 1) from O Sensei in weapons is the 31 Jo kata that as far as I know was designed from the bottom up by him incorporating his knowledge of ken, spear, naginata, bokken and bayonet into one movement pattern system integrated with empty handed technique. Morihiro Saito Sensei (from now on referred to simply as Sensei) himself learned the form from O Sensei (circa 1946) in a flowing form and later he broke it down to individual moves for the sake of teaching, eventually settling on 31 distinct moves.

The 13 Jo Kata is somewhat more mysterious as to its origin. In an interview with the late Stanley Pranin of Aiki News, Sensei claims to have put together the kata from different sequences he could only remember in part from what he witnessed O Sensei practicing [1]. Were these sequences from older forms O Sensei had learned himself or were they sequences he created for his own study?

Either way the kata Sensei 'assembled' from these parts has itself a beauty and coherence that belies its supposedly piecemeal origins.

The 31 Jo kata partner practice was added by Saito Sensei much later and in various parts feels somewhat 'forced' as a fit. While the partner practice has great benefits, my opinion is that the 31 kata originally was designed as a stand alone practice and not designed with partner work in mind.

[1] for a more detailed account: Birth of Iwama Weapons System. by Adrian Punt and Michael Ormerod, TAE Journal, 2022, Edition 8, pgs.28-37. <https://traditionalaikido.eu/journal.html>

However the 13 Jo kata partner practice is clearly coherent. Of all the ways of using a Jo the primary one is a thrust (tsuki) and the 13 Jo kata partner is a study in responses to this primary attack in three different directions. Beautiful.

I think the system we have reflects O Sensei's Aikido and the emphasis in his art on partner practice. In the Iwama period his main training partner for weapons was Sensei. I was able to ask him once what kind of practice he did in the mornings alone with O Sensei. His reply was that most of what they did was one and two step awase (blending) work. Very simple forms and rarely more complex forms (such as the Kumitachi).

I see Sensei as the organiser, developer and teacher of the system he learned from his teacher and given his skill as both practitioner and teacher he soon found himself teaching large groups: in Iwama, at universities, at Tokyo Hombu and eventually regular international seminars with hundreds of people. I think this is where level 1 or the solo aspect of weapon training became more prominent as a preparation and prelude to the partner work.

In the period I trained with him in the late 80's his footwork, knee work, hip work (the classic rotate and drop movement at the heart of the ken strike and taijutsu) and his sense of balance were all superb. And we did a looooooot of suburi and kata with a lot of attention to details directly related to structure and movement refinement. Level 1 is the level where one can focus on issues of structure movement and power generation without the distraction of an attacking partner and therefore is essential as a foundational level of training in our system.

It is often said in the oriental martial arts that to truly understand motion one must first study stillness - as the source of all movement. When we practice kata or suburi at the basic level we are moving from stillness into motion and returning to stillness at completion.

Hence we are also working on the transitions - from stillness to movement and from movement to stillness. Making these transitions seamless and hence void of extraneous movement prepares us for real ki no nagare where we remain rooted in the principles and are simple and essential in action. Movement in stillness and stillness in movement. Maybe the topic for another essay...

2) Also, if we look e.g. into Shinto Muso-ryu jodo there are many interesting moves which we never practice; somehow not using all the possibilities of the jo.

I think I have partially answered this above. The suburi are extracts primarily from the ken awase work and 31 and 13 jo kata. There are many moves in the Kumitachi, Kumijo (and later Ken Tai Jo) that are not included. Why not?

I think that the bulk of the solo work (with some notable exceptions) is not about learning complex moves but about putting one's bodily structure in order and establishing a connection with one's weapon as an extension of one's body and in particular one's centre. My own experience has taught me that, in teaching, if I keep it simple and repetitive, these connections can be made more easily than if I introduce lots of complex movement variety to my students. The challenge for teachers is to keep this solid, basic, repetitive practice interesting, in order to hold the students' attention and motivation (until they themselves can appreciate the depth of simple movements such as a simple shomen with a bokken). However, once these basic connections (ground-body-weapon) are minimally in place, more 'advanced' and complex moves are just an extension of the basic patterns. In my own weekly practice and teaching, I teach 80% basic moves (if not more), but in seminars, when I show more advanced forms - which I hardly ever practice - I can just do them. From my basics.

So do we need more solo kata? Personally, I don't think so, as we have enough to work with

what we have. It is up to instructors to be able to 'play creatively' with the system and make it both challenging and fascinating for their students.

3) Taijutsu we always practice on both sides, but the bokken is only practiced on one side. It is understandable for partner practice, but wouldn't it be better to also practice the 'weak' side? With the jo e.g. on move 6 in the 31, we could end up in left hanmi with the left hand in front instead of hands crossing.

Absolutely! Please feel free to do so. Sokaku Takeda – O Sensei's teacher – did the same thing with the sword, being adept at its use equally on both sides (right hand above and left hand above). So there is no rule against developing this. I think the bias in weapons is based on the Japanese sword tradition in general with its strict etiquette as to draw and positioning, and on the fact that the majority of people are right-handed.

4) Can you suggest some training methods to improve our striking ability as aikidoka? It is often undervalued and not trained enough in my opinion, although it is clearly inherent to the art. If our strikes are weak, how can we expect them to appropriately challenge our partner and vice versa? Any tips on conditioning the knuckles or joints, how to build whole body punching power, or the famous 'uraken'? And more importantly, how can we get people to punch with commitment and on target when so many hold back or intentionally miss for fear of hitting someone?

Various questions here of importance so I will break it down a bit.

First I recommend reading a previous article I wrote on this topic: Atemi and Aikido - by Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros, TAE Journal, 2019, Edition 1.

Here I will take a different angle on the topic to address the questions posed above.

Yes atemi (strikes) are very important in Aikido and so its training should be more clearly integrated in our practice in my opinion. I think that the lack of emphasis goes back in part to the pedagogic sequence we have inherited from Morihiro Saito Sensei. In Iwama, at basic level, the emphasis in training techniques and developing good ukemi was more on solid bodywork, balance, footwork, angles, non resistance, distances and timing. For example consider a basic kote gaeshi from chudan tsuki (punch to solar plexus). In Kote gaeshi, the atemi on the rotation is essential to stop uke following you with a punch. However, Sensei would have us practice this technique at first without the atemi, focusing on good awase (joining -leading) and tai sabaki (body movement). Once this was 'good enough', the atemi part of the technique would be added carefully. He said that atemi, if taught from the beginning, in many techniques would disturb and break up good body motion patterns.

Since we spend so much time on basics working on the above mentioned skills, atemi have been somewhat relegated in importance.



However, from senior levels, atemi needs to be honed and developed, as many techniques and levels of the system depend on them (think oyo waza - applied techniques - for example).

Furthermore, although at basic level we work mostly with grab attacks, techniques from strikes and punches (and kicks) are clearly part of the training corpus. Hence, our partners need to give us effective and challenging attacks at this level for us to develop skills against attacks of this nature.

So the question is: How best to develop striking skills as aikidoka – as both nage and uke?

First of all, the atemi skill we develop should be coherent with the principles underlying the other areas in Aikido we are developing. In both weapons and taijutsu we seek movement and power that is rooted in the ground, directed from the center of the body and expressed through the hands or weapon. Our atemi should be based on these same dynamics.

In the Iwama dojo, makiwara were available for both weapon training (particularly the bokken with a rubber car tyre mounted in a frame) and the pine pole mounted straw pad for punching practice.

For punching, the fist, forearm, elbow, shoulder and lower body positions are very important. It is very important to start slowly, generating the blow from the foot while rotating the body from the centre, finally delivering the punch such that the rebound travels back along the same path through the body and into the ground. If the punch is delivered from the upper body and the shoulder is not in place, the rebound will not be 'grounded back', but will focus on the upper joints and can damage them. As for the hands (whether used as closed or open) they need to be conditioned slowly through proper technique, incrementally increasing speed and power.

For all the above, good one-to-one instruction from someone competent in makiwara training is a must.

I generally do not recommend cross-training in a striking art such as Karate or boxing, for the simple reason that serious training in these arts, whose aims and movement patterns are different from Aikido, will cause disruption to one's form.

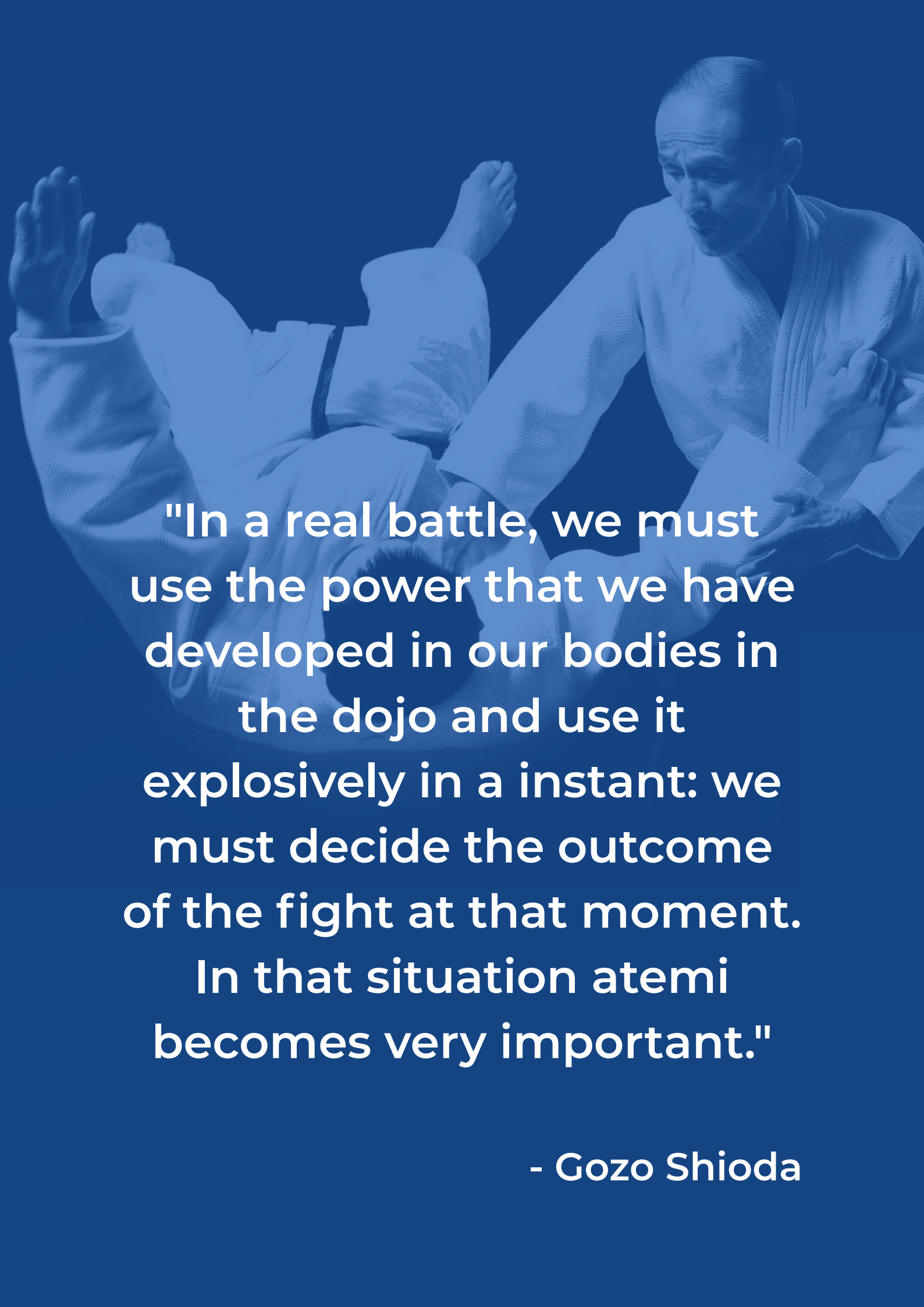
In my experience with students trying this, the first thing to get disrupted is hanmi. Beyond that, the intention in Aikido with atemi is very different from Karate or boxing (see my previously mentioned article in TAE Journal 1) and hence confusion and disruption are real risks.

Students who come into Aikido, having previously seriously practiced atemi in some other martial art, are obviously at a big advantage in this area. However, even these students must 'put aside' these skills while they absorb the movement and intention patterns in Aikido, much later incorporating atemi in a way which is synergistic with the art and not in conflict with it.

As to the last part of the question – how to get Ukes to attack with precision and commitment – I think it is a matter of first developing striking skills through solo practice (as we do with weapons with suburi), and then emphasising going slow and precise with partner work. Commitment and clear intention need to be present in everything we do. Attacking with atemi or delivering them in techniques is no different. What needs to be understood is that a good attack is a gift when delivered with precision, intention, and measured speed and power, which allows nage to develop real skills as an Aikidoka.

If you have any questions for Lewis, or in regards to the articles in this issue - submit your question via our mailbox:

[CLICK HERE](#)



"In a real battle, we must use the power that we have developed in our bodies in the dojo and use it explosively in a instant: we must decide the outcome of the fight at that moment. In that situation atemi becomes very important."

- Gozo Shioda



REVIEWING THE CLASSICS

Angry White Pyjamas

By Robert Twigger
(First published 1997)

Reviewed by Adrian Punt

It was 1997 and leading up to Christmas. I had been a student of Aikido for just over three years when a good friend presented to me, as a Christmas present, a copy of 'Angry White Pyjamas: an Oxford Poet trains with the Tokyo Riot Police'. That book, specifically a first edition copy, has remained with me now for nearly 30-years. The cover and pages have yellowed; the binding has come loose in places. Nonetheless, it remains a treasured procession and one that has been reread many times. It was at the time of publication, in the UK at least, a 'must read' for any aspiring Aikidoka. If you haven't read it, hopefully this article will encourage you to explore, or at least consider, the narrative and Tokyo based 1990s aiki-adventures that the book offers.

Robert Twigger (born 30 October 1962), is a British author who studied at Oxford University in England. He initially studied engineering, but after six weeks switched to politics and philosophy. Whilst at Oxford, Twigger won a prestigious poetry prize. However, his post-university professional writing activities were far from successful. After a 700-km, solitary walk through the Pyrenees Mountains, from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, Twigger eventually decided to move to Japan, drawn by the promise of high wages, new places to write about, exotic girlfriends and Teshu – specifically Yamaoka Teshu – a nineteenth-century Samurai poet, warrior, Zen adept and artist.



Angry White Pyjamas, Twigger's first and award-winning book (the first of many), recounts Twigger's decision to enrol in the Yoshinkan Senshusei ('senshusei' meaning 'specific training programme') course, a gruelling 11-month Aikido program originally designed for the Tokyo Riot Police. What begins as a whimsical attempt to get fit and add some adventure to his expat life, quickly transforms into a relentless test of endurance, discipline, and self-discovery.

Twigger sets the stage with humour and candour. Living in Tokyo in the mid-1990s, he feels adrift - unfit, uninspired, and somewhat cowardly. A road rage incident sparks a realisation: he has no idea how he would defend himself if attacked. This moment of vulnerability leads him and his flat mates, Chris and 'Fat Frank', to explore martial arts, eventually landing at the Yoshinkan Aikido Dojo in Tokyo. From here, the narrative plunges into the world of Yoshinkan Aikido, where tradition, ritual, and physical punishment collide. For some, the view of Aikido, presented as a brutal, and vengeful, martial art in the book may not sit well, but it services to remind us of the broad nature, and multiple interpretations of the art we follow.

The senshusei course, originally created in 1957 by Gozo Shioda, founder of Yoshinkan Aikido, is notorious: four hours of daily training, five days a week, plus cleaning duties, weekend sessions, and public demonstrations. Twigger describes the agony of endless kneeling, fractured collarbones, and blood-stained dogi uniforms with vivid detail. Yet his writing never wallows in misery. Instead, he balances the brutality with sharp wit and self-deprecation. His "white pyjamas" - the Aikido dogi - become a symbol of both humiliation and transformation.

The book is a sports memoir with a Japanese - and specifically Aikido theme, chronicling the physical and psychological

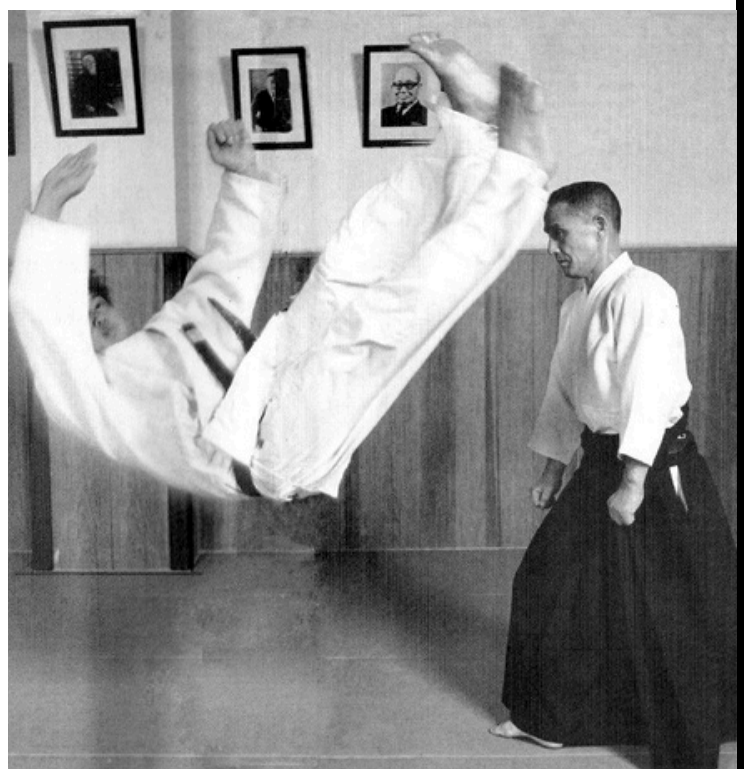
toll of martial arts training in a server, verging on militaristic and highly demanding environment. Twigger's voice is consistently engaging. He is not a natural athlete - he is an Oxford Poet, and he makes no attempt to disguise his shortcomings. His honesty about failure - collapsing during drills, struggling with techniques, questioning his own resolve - all paint a picture of harsh and relentless training under the Yoshinkan Aikido Senshusei Course, but with accomplishment and achievement of, ultimately surviving and completing the course.

I have now been to and trained in Japan, albeit not at a Yoshinkan Dojo. Nonetheless, Twigger's commitment, the intensity of training and life as a soto deshi still fascinate me. To me, the book is also an important reminder how O-sensei's primary students interpreted and subsequently formulated teaching systems, systems that now equate to very distinct styles of Aikido.

Angry White Pyjamas: An Oxford Poet Trains with the Tokyo Riot Police - Twigger, Robert

ISBN 10: 0575401249 ISBN 13: 9780575401242

Publisher: Orion mass market paperback, 1997



SEMINAR SCHEDULE

2026

17-18 JANUARY

Oisterwijk, NL

**Seminar with Lars Landberg and
5 year Anniversary**

Contact: Bernie:

contact@aikido-oisterwijk.nl

31 JAN / 1-2 FEB

Kidderminster, UK

Takemusu Aikido Midlands Intensive

Contact: Brendon:

info@takemusuaikidomidlands.com

31 JAN / 1-2 FEB

Malmsheim, Germany

**Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo
de Quiros**

Contact: Barbara:

coyote.blue@gmx.net

21-22 FEBRUARY

Glumsø, Denmark

**Seminar with Sascha Pihan and
Johnny Jacobsen**

Contact: Chushin:

chushin.aikido.dojo@gmail.com

21-22 MARCH

Lancaster UK

**Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo
de Quiros**

Contact: Ellie:

edenvir@gmail.com

11-12 APRIL

Weesp, NL

**Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo
de Quiros**

Contact: Arjan:

xzeroxz@gmail.com

21-26 APRIL

Motril, Spain

**Intensive Seminar with Lewis
Bernaldo de Quiros**

Contact: Lewis:

lewisbdeq@gmail.com

8-10 MAY

Dorset, UK

Seminar with Thomas Nord

Contact: Mark:

contact@wellspringsaikido.co.uk

15-17 MAY**(TBC): Belgium****Yudansha Seminar, Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros**Contact: Filip Schuerbeke
info@irad.be**27-28 JUNE****Cumbria, UK****Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros**Contact: Adrian Punt
adrian@radecol.co.uk**13-18 JULY****Summer Camp, Urnäsch, CH**

Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros

Contact: See web-page**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:
chushin.aikido.dojo@gmail.com**(TBD) SEPTEMBER****Motril, Spain****Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros**Contact: Lewis:
lewisbdeq@gmail.com**18-20 SEPTEMBER****San Mateo, US****Seminar with Hoa Newens and Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros**Contact: Lewis:
lewisbdeq@gmail.com

10-11 OCTOBER**Copenhagen, Denmark
Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo
de Quiros**

Contact: Lars: lars@aikido-
copenhagen.dk

23-25 OCTOBER**Magdeburg, Germany
Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo
de Quiros**

Contact: Christiane:
christiane@laehnemann.de

7-8 NOVEMBER**7-8: Weesp NL
Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo
de Quiros**

Contact: Arjan de Haan
xzeroxz@gmail.com

21-22 NOVEMBER**21-22: Dorset, UK
Seminar with Lewis Bernaldo
de Quiros**

Contact: Mark Allcock
contact@wellspringsaikido.co.uk

11-13 DECEMBER**Præstø, Denmark
Intensive with Lewis Bernaldo
de Quiros**

Contact: Chushin:
chushin.aikido.dojo@gmail.com

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