

# Aikidosphere

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## On Aikido and Weapons Training

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"One can find closest common elements between Aikido and Kendo in terms of movements. Kendo seems fundamentally different on a first glance, however, the movement in Aikido is really movement in sword . . ." This is an excerpt from the first book about Aikido, written by Doshu [Second Doshu Kisshomaru Ueshiba] under the supervision of O-Sensei.

As I see Aikido movements, I see the similarity with Kendo in maintaining proper Maai and closing the Maai with your partner to the point of "Issoku Itto" (the distance one can reach within one strike). This is exactly the Maai concept in Kendo.

The training method in Aikido starts with body movements. By learning weapons, however, one can learn many things that cannot be learned by body movements alone. For example, one can learn such elements as: Maai (distance), Hyoshi (tempo, rhythm), Kokyū (breathing, timing), Tai sabaki (body manipulation), Ashi sabaki (foot-work), Shutou (hand as sword), etc.

Of course, there are differences between body-work and weapons training; however, body movements in Aikido and weapons are on the extension of the same line.

Everybody understands the importance of weapons training. However, generally speaking, the understanding is that body-work has the principal role and weapons training has the supporting role. I disagree with this. One must train with weapons as much as, if not more than, body arts to understand it fully. One needs to train weapons repeatedly for many years and then one can unify weapons work with body-work.

As I said, one must train in weapons a lot, but this repeated training must be done correctly. Correct Suburi should be done over and over until the weapon fits in your palm without the feeling of an object. When one handles the weapon, one needs to use the entire body. As with body training, one needs to knead the body with weapons training. As you knead your body, the weapon starts to show its power. For example, in Sansho, each component of the movement is from the 36 Jyō basic techniques. In Sansho, we train from one movement to the other by continuously flowing; however, unless each movement is solid and contains power, our exercise will only become a performance. Each movement must be clear, yet the whole series must have a smooth flow. As I said before, one must reach a certain level of proficiency in weapons before one can truly



unify weapons with body-work. Kneading one's body is the same through body-work and weapons training. The important point is the solidness of one's center. One needs to train in both body arts and weapons until one can see the common elements in both.

In Aikido, we have Tachi tori (sword take-away) and Jyo tori (Jyo take-away) techniques. I suppose everybody who is training in Aikido should know that bare hands against a weapons attack, and controlling opponents by throwing or pinning, are the ultimate state of the martial art. This is not unique to Aikido. Many Budoka (martial artists) historically studied and trained at the risk of their lives. Think about it. You must, with your bare hands, take away a live blade (sword) from an attacker who intends to kill you with it! This cannot be done by technique alone. One must have a very strong mind. As you can see, it is not easy. For this realization, you must train in weapons constantly.

I would like to finish this article by quoting an excerpt from Aikido, the book mentioned in the beginning:

"Those who train in Aikido, must be able to demonstrate Aiki-ken when you hold a sword and Aiki Jyo when hold a jyo in your hand. Of course, sword and Jyo are extension of your body and you must handle these weapons as if they have your blood running through them. Unless you can make the weapons part of your body (running blood), you have not truly trained in Aikido."

These were O-Sensei's words. I would like to train even harder by trying to understand what O-Sensei meant by this.