

Aikidosphere

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Aikido - Etiquette and Transmission

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Editor's Note: We are extremely happy to present the next installment of Tamura Sensei's book Aikido - Etiquette and Transmission. This work, which has been available only in French is here presented first time in English. We are grateful to Tamura Sensei for his permission to produce this version.

Thanks also go to Stephane Benedetti, 5th Dan, Chief Instructor of Mutokukai Europe Dojo Mirabeau, and student of Tamura Sensei, who translated (from Japanese), edited and published the original version, which was published by Les Editions du Soleil Levant in 1991. Photos courtesy: René Bonnardel.

Chapter 5: Places and Methods of Practice

Places

Budo is normally practiced in a dojo; however it is also a good thing to practice in different places, for example in a house, in fields, in the woods, by the sea or in the snow.

The practice of Aikido is an asceticism of every instant, which is like saying all daily activities are perceived as the study and practice of the principles of Aikido. It is useless to look for complications. It is enough to relax the shoulders, to keep the ki in the seika tanden and to have the right attitude.

The techniques of Aikido do not oppose the opponent's strength. It is the same on the mental plane. Start by doing what you can...

One can practice sitting at a table, while walking, at work, in the restrooms...even while sleeping. If one's position and breathing are correct, one cannot but sleep well.

When one doesn't know how to behave, one must invoke the master one respects or one's God and identify oneself to him. For example, if O-Sensei is the master you respect you must ask yourself: "If I was O-Sensei, what would I do?"

The answer will surely come. Then simply act in the same spirit, thinking O-Sensei is acting.

Methods

After having briefly treated the places of practice, I would like to expand a little on the methods. It is possible to train alone, in pairs or with multiple partners.



When training one's students, it is desirable to use different methods to evaluate their progress.

Hitori-geiko

When alone, it is enough to have a little time and space. One way to practice alone has been explained in the preceding chapter. It is also possible to do breathing exercises linked to Aikido movements, suburi, and tanren-uchi. In the forest, one can use the trees as partners. Try your own experiments...Imagine and teach...

Ippan-geiko

This is the regular practice in the dojo. The teacher proposes a model and the practitioners repeat it at will. We will try to give a more precise analysis of this training.

Futsu-geiko

Practitioners of all levels alternatively repeat the technique proposed by the teacher.

Uchikomi-geiko

This is the way to practice with a more advanced partner or a teacher. Let's take, for example, ryote tori tenchi nage or the way to take position for a koshi nage. The student will start the technique and stop just before the throw. He or she will then repeat this on both sides, without stopping, until he or she is out of breath. The role of the teacher is then to allow the student to develop his or her flexibility, precision and speed of movement.

The advantages of this method are as follows:

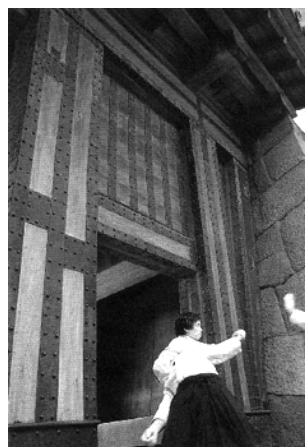
- It helps to make technical progress.
- It helps breathing.
- It helps the quality of body movements.
- It helps balance.
- It stabilizes the ki in the seika tanden.
- It develops kokyu ryo-ku.

Hikitate-geiko

This is another form of training by which the higher ranked help the lower ranked make progress. When the lower ranked practitioner exerts useless or confused strength, the higher ranked practitioner cancels, without blocking, the effects of this force and does not force himself to fall. This method aims at correcting the errors and weak points with benevolence.

When the execution of the movement is satisfactory, one must fall simply, in a way that allows a good extension and a good relaxation in the practice as well as getting pleasure.

If you fall well, you create the conditions for a better understanding and you support the technical blossoming of your partner. One must never overwhelm a lower ranked partner with force or knowledge, at the risk of killing the germ of progress in him. Students and kohai are our own mirror. All our defects and weak points can be found in their movements. It is thus very important to devote the greatest attention



to correcting oneself.

The lower ranked students must accept advice from the higher ranked simply in order to correct their practice and improve. The responsibility of the sempai or the teacher is to foster an open-minded attitude in the beginners instead of an a priori critical attitude.

Gokaku-geiko

This form is practiced between people of equal technical and physical skill. It is important to avoid mutual complacency, frivolity or systematic blocking. This is a time to study techniques that are taught less often, that are difficult and, of course, any technique whose execution poses problems.

Kakari-geiko

Practitioners of the same level successively and without interruption attack one practitioner who repeats the technique. Since there are many ukes, they do not tire as fast. This adds to the advantages of uchikomi-geiko:

Development of kiryoku (power of the will)

Good visual perception exercise

Development of the feelings

Jyu-geiko

As its name indicates, jyu-geiko (jyu = freedom) means to practice freely: to choose the theme of one's study and then practice and study. Jyu-waza means free technique. One then looks for the technique that is the best response to an attack, or even renders it impossible. This type of training favors freedom of movement. Confusion between jyu-geiko and jyu-waza is frequent but it is desirable to clearly distinguish them.

Mitori-geiko

It sometimes happens that we are physically unable to practice, which doesn't mean it is impossible to work and improve. One can then take advantage of those moments to study, by watching class, the physical and mental aspects of techniques. One can take advantage of the position of observer to put into perspective what is difficult to grasp when physically involved.

Yagai-geiko

Training in the dojo is done while imagining a real situation, but the dojo has its limits. It is thus useful to get out of this context and practice outside and train the eye, the feet, the hands and the body in different environments. Needless to say nature presents irregularities that mats don't. There are holes and bumps; certain soils (like mud or ice) are more slippery than others. Other soils, like wet sand or clay, stick to the feet. Thick grass may hide obstacles. One must beware of hard surfaces such as rocks, concrete or loose stones on which it is easy to get hurt.

It then becomes important to adapt one's way of walking by making small steps and sliding the feet lightly. The direction of a slope, the orientation of the sun and wind as well as shade, light, darkness, the surrounding vegetation, the trees, the branches and the bushes must all be taken into account to determine the choice of an advantageous position relative to the opponent. To take only the example of ukemi, one must think and experiment to adapt ukemi practice to the outdoors.

The choice of weapons must be adapted to the environment and one must train in order to feel the criteria guiding this choice. This is why it is desirable, if we have the necessary time and space, to train outside in nature where, as opposed to the dojo, we breathe pure and fresh air in the sunlight in the middle of a free space. Such an exercise feels good and is also good for the body. We bathe in the ki of the sky and earth. This allows an expansive and relaxed practice.

If we practice in a pretty forest amidst tall and beautiful trees we will be filled with a vigorous ki! Nature provides many occasions to practice alone: suburi with boken or jo, tanren uchi...

It is also possible to practice kumitachi more freely than inside a dojo. There is also night training, in nature, during the full or new moon. As a reminder, the Bugeijuhappan (the eighteen branches of the art of war) included swimming, which makes it possible to conceive of variations on training in water.

In conclusion, let's add that practice changes with the seasons. The body and spirit are fortified in the hottest time of summer (shochu-geiko) or in the coldest time of winter (kan-geiko).

Etsunen-geiko is the exercise done during the New Year period. Taking advantage of the holiday period, we can "live" together during the gasshuku-geiko.