

Although only the defense techniques are aikido, still the attacker's role is not to be neglected. The kind of attack and the skill of it are also of importance. Because aikido itself contains no attack techniques, it is common that the students train them insufficiently, and do them with little concentration. But sloppy and weak attacks lead to sloppy and weak aikido. Both roles are important, because aikido is about guiding the attacking force.

The attacker in aikido is called *uke*, like in the term for falling technique: *ukemi*. The kanji for uke is a sign that means to receive and be susceptible. The symbols that compose the sign show a hand giving something. So, the attacker is the one who is led, who is receiving.

The defender, the one who leads, is called *tori* – or *nage*, as in *nagewaza*, throwing techniques. *Tori* simply means to take. Amusingly, it is written with the symbols of somebody grabbing the ear of another – an action that seems to be comparable to the western use of it, and therefore implies a correcting purpose, like that of a teacher or parent.

Observe that the word pair *tori* and *uke* does not signify give and take, but take and receive. So, the two have similar roles in the aikido training. The difference is that *tori* has the initiative, although *uke* is the one who starts it off with the attack. In aikido, then, you should take over the initiative – not to win, but for both to learn something. Since this means so much more than just throwing somebody, I prefer the word *tori*, not *nage*. Still, both words are used for the defender in aikido.

Tori's role is that of the placid one, who calmly awaits the attack and then neutralizes it as pleasantly as possible. Naturally, the attacker's role is quite different. He or she is supposed to charge with complete concentration and maximum skill. Inferior attacks result in bad training and disharmony in the aikido techniques.



The author showing maegeri, front kick, on David Bradna, at a seminar in Pardubice, Czech Republic. Photo by Leos Matousek.

Attacking spirit

It is not easy to be a good uke. You need to master a number of attack techniques, *kogeki*, usually brought in from the other budo arts – such as punches and kicks from karatedo, sword strikes from kendo, grips from judo, and so on. It is not enough to lazily hint these techniques, just because you know that you are going to miss and get thrown. Each time, you must attack wholeheartedly and forcefully, without any thought on what the defense will be.

This usually works fine the first time you practice a certain aikido technique, but already when uke stands up again for a second attack, his attitude and approach have changed. Uke knows what technique will be done on him, so he unconsciously redirects his attack slightly – either to make it more difficult for the partner to do the aikido technique, or to make it easier and more comfortable. Unfortunately, from that moment on the training is a bit falsified.

Aikido is not as much about the physiology of extended arms and charging bodies, as it is about energies and laws inside of the bodily manifestations. Therefore it is important that the spirit of the attack is correct. Uke must adapt the

spirit of an attacker, and express it consistently. The strikes are aimed right at the defender, and the grips strive to hold the defender – just like in a fight. Of course, the attacker still needs to show the same care as the defender does, so that no one gets harmed.

Uke should exert himself to act like a great samurai: advance with the center, let his *ki* flow, and show firm determination. Aikido is constructed to work against the best and most skilled attack, and the most competent challenger. Only when uke tries his utmost to be all that, tori is given a chance to develop an aikido with such superiority.

Uke must all through the technique remain in an attacking spirit. Many practitioners make a forceful initial charge, but relax as soon as tori starts with the responding aikido technique. They become almost lifeless weights to throw or lead down to a pinning. That is not natural. The will to attack shall remain all through, so that if tori makes some mistake in the aikido technique, it is possible for uke to get free and attack anew.

This may seem like an aggressive game, but it is exactly what the aikido techniques are made to handle. That is the path to the softest and most pleasant techniques. Aikido should transform aggression into peacefulness. If the former is never present, there is no way of learning how to make the transformation.

A competent attack follows the same principles as the aikido defense techniques. The body center, *tanden*, is the base, and *ki* is the energy that constitutes the true attack. Uke shall strive for good balance and control, turn his belly in the direction he is moving, and never lose concentration. He shall try to keep the initiative – attack where he can, and protect himself where he feels threatened.

When learning how to attack correctly, you will benefit from studying and appreciating how this is done in the budo arts that train attacks as much as defense. So, for punches and kicks, look at karatedo, for grips study judo, for sword techniques consider kendo and iaido, for staff techniques see jodo, and so on. The more familiar you are with other mar-



Present doshu Moriteru Ueshiba, Osensei's grandson, at a Stockholm demonstration. Photo by Magnus Hartman.

tial arts – and not only the Japanese ones – the trustworthier your aikido solutions will become.

Grabbing a wrist

The seemingly most simple of attacks is *katatedori*, grabbing the defender's wrist. It is actually just as demanding and complex as any other attack. Uke takes a quick step forward and catches tori's wrist in a steady grip, which stops the hand from retreating as well as from attacking uke. So, the grip is both a defense and an attack. Also, it is easily followed up by a strike with the free hand.

To grab somebody is to tie him or her to one's center, similar to holding a dog by a leash. You take a steady stance and strive to control your partner's body and movements through the grip. As with the sword guard *chudankamae*, you apply your grip in front of your center, and should be able to maneuver your partner's arm as freely as you would a sword in your hand.

Grabbing your partner's wrist is in many ways similar to holding your sword. In your grip, the little finger is the most important one and should be tied the hardest around

the partner's wrist. Your balance and the power of your grip are rooted in your center, and you should be able to immediately change your own position as well as that of the arm you hold.

If the defender tries to break free with a strike, his arm can easily be used to parry the strike. If the defender tries to tear himself away, the grip will tighten and he will lose his balance. By the grip, the attacker aims to bring the defender into his sphere, his universe. This cannot be accomplished with tense muscles, but by relaxation and a focused spirit. Then it will be quite difficult for tori to get free. The harmonious way of aikido must be applied.

All through the aikido technique, the attacker strives to keep this control. As much as he can, he tries to turn his belly toward the wrist grip, and continues to direct his ki, his attacking power, toward the defender. When the aikido technique is done in a slow tempo, this can seem strained and exaggerated, but when it is done in normal speed it becomes obvious that this attitude is the only possible one. Aikido works in such a way that the attacker is unable to interrupt the attack before the technique is completed.

The attacker's defense

With increasing refinement as you develop, your aikido defense uses one circumstance that is evident to any attacker: The one who attacks must count on being vulnerable, too. The one who strives to hurt someone else also runs the risk of being hurt. So, the attacker wants to protect himself as well as win the fight. Any attack includes some kind of defense.

Many aikido techniques are built on the body's and the mind's basic struggle to survive. The instinct to protect oneself overshadows any conscious ambition and any trained series of movements. Also the most lionhearted champion has reflexes that twitch in him when sensitive parts of the body are exposed to threats. Thereby the defender can manipulate the attacker.

But these reflexes can only be used when uke is as con-

centrated on attacking, as he would be if it were done in actual malice. So, uke must imitate this feeling when attacking. There is no need to pounce like a rabid dog at the defender, because that only leads to injuries and a very unpleasant atmosphere in the dojo. It has to remain a controlled pretense. Uke can accomplish this by being focused on the attack, and remaining ignorant of what the defender aims to do – no matter how many times it is repeated. Uke shall react to the aikido techniques as if unprepared for them.

Practice in such a spirit is an effective way of emptying one's mind of thoughts. That is a budo way to emptiness and clarity. Also, taking turns with attacking and defending is excellent training in directing one's ki and controlling one's temper. At one moment you are uke, a forceful and intense attacker, and the next moment you are tori, the placid and gentle defender. That opens for a calm soul.