



Taninzugake, defense against several attackers, at a seminar in Pardubice, Czech Republic. Photo by Leos Matousek.

Introduction

In aikido training, the actual aikido technique is always a defense, and not an attack. It is usually trained in a paired exercise, where one uses aikido techniques to defend against the other's attacks. So, an attack in aikido is merely a service to the defender, so that he or she can practice the aikido techniques.

Therefore, it is quite common in aikido that both training partners focus almost completely on the defender role, and neglect that of the attacker. It can go so far as to a state very near sleep when attacking, as if this is a moment for rest, until again it is time to be the defender.

Such a way of training is unfortunate in so many ways. Mainly, it causes one's focus soon to become blurred also in the defender role. Without working on increasingly advanced attacks, it is impossible to advance in one's aikido. We need to be more skilled as attackers, to be able to teach each other higher skills in the defense.

I do not primarily mean the self-defense aspect, although that also needs to be considered. Here I think of the way (*do*) of aikido. When attacks get more precise, focused, and sophisticated, then they stimulate the refinement of your aikido and your understanding of its nature. When you show just as much care about your attacks as you do about your defense, then it will truly be aikido.

It's more fun, too, if you devote yourself to the attacker's mind and strategy, when your partner is the defender – and then switch to the defender mind when it's your turn to do aikido techniques. The shift of behavior is good mental training, indeed. Sort of instant acting: to switch immediately from one role to its opposite. You'll have twice the fun at practice.

Tori and uke

取受

The defender in aikido is called *tori*. It literally means to take, fetch, catch, hold, seize, pick up, and such. Its pictogram (*kanji*) consists of two signs: the one for the ear, and the one for 'again' or 'on the other hand'. So, the combination suggests attentiveness, and correction of some sort. The second sign also suggests a hand, thereby making the combination mean grabbing someone by the ear, like parents do when correcting or disciplining their children.

The attacker is called *uke*, which means to receive, accept, undergo, and so forth. It is used for catching a ball, answering the phone, or undergoing an operation, among many other things. This *kanji* consists of three parts. On top is the sign for a claw or nail, below that the sign for a lid, and at the bottom the sign of 'again' or the hand (the same as in *tori*). This implies passing something from one hand to another, where the upper one is the stronger and the lower weaker – both because of the signs used and their positions.

So, the words used for the defender and the attacker of aikido suggest that the former is the teacher and the latter the student. The exercise between them seems to be of the nature that the defender is teaching something to the attacker.



Ryotedori, gripping both wrists, at a children's class in Stockholm. Photo by Gunilla Welin.

Of course, this can be understood as aikido showing attackers the folly of their way. If you attack, you are defeated, so you should learn never to do so. I remember that Shoji Nishio, a very prominent aikido teacher, stressed this repeatedly in his classes. Tori's task is to show uke the futility of attacking. Therefore, the aikido techniques should be compassionate and never harmful. Otherwise, how would the attacker be able to benefit from the experience?

The terms used also suggest, although indirectly, who is the winner and who the loser. There is no competition in aikido, therefore neither winner nor loser. Uke should not be defeated. Instead, the attack should be used as a possibility to demonstrate the principles of aikido, the martial art moving away from battle up to the point of making it non-existent. The defender is the teacher correcting the attacker, who is the student, by transforming the attack into something that is to the delight of both.

For the purpose of this book, it is important to observe how the choice of terms for the defender and the attacker point out the necessity for the latter to expect a learning experience. We practice the role of the defender in order to



Miyamoto Musashi fights Tsukahara Bokuden. Woodprint by Yoshitoshi, 1885.

learn aikido, but the true purpose of aikido is to teach the attacker. So, the role of the attacker cannot be ignored.

The legendary 17th century samurai Miyamoto Musashi said that the teacher is the needle, and the student is the thread. Again an example of one leading, and the other being led. And again it stresses the importance of the uke role as that of the real student. When the garment is completed, the thread remains in it, continuing to fulfill its function, whereas the needle is long gone.

So, let's treat the uke role with the sincerity that it demands. Let's learn proper attacks and the true mind of the attacker.

In aikido, other words are sometimes used for the defender – such as *nage*, simply meaning the one who throws, or *shite*, the leading hand, the protagonist, or the hero (like in a play). That is a pity, since they don't hold the same symbolic meanings as the word *tori* does – especially in relation to the word *uke*. Another word than *uke* is rarely used for the attacker in aikido.

攻撃

Kogeki

Below, I present all the basic attack techniques (*kogeki* or *kogekiho*) in aikido, and explain what to think about when training them. I don't try to be complete. For example, some difficult kicks and some rare and odd grips are missing, as well as some armed attacks. What is included, though, covers most of what is trained in any aikido dojo.

Some of these attacks are very commonly used in aikido practice, such as wrist grips (*katatedori*), fist strikes (*tsuki*), and open hand strikes (*shomenuchi* and *yokomenuchi*). Others are rare, in some cases barely practiced at all, for example the bear hug (*kakaedori*), the sleeve grip (*sodedori*), or grabbing both the shoulder and the wrist (*kata katatedori*).

It would be a pity if some exotic attack forms disappeared completely from the aikido curriculum. Each attack has its own lesson to give, and shows different aspects of the aikido techniques when used against it. If practice is limited to just a few attacks, then the techniques are not learned properly, and not examined at enough depth.

The basic idea in aikido regarding the inclusion or exclusion of attack forms is simply that every possible attack should be included. Contrary to many other martial arts, in aikido we try to familiarize ourselves with whatever attack makes any sense to an attacker. The aikido techniques should be applicable to just about any situation, so they need to be tried against as many different attack types as possible. In most other martial arts, the techniques are trained against a selection of attacks only.

This broad spectrum of attacks in aikido makes it next to impossible to master them all. Some seem easy enough, but even something as basic as grabbing a wrist can be done with more or less skill. The more the skill, the better for the purpose of learning how to defend against the attacks with aikido techniques.

This may seem like an impossible task, but there are some general principles that apply to all kinds of attacks. If these basics are trained, you will quickly notice that you in-



Gyakuhanmi katatedori, wrist grip, on a seminar at Enighet, the author's dojo in Malmö, Sweden. Photo by Anders Heinonen.

crease your skills also with things that you do not practice that often. The basics of attacking are presented and explained in one chapter of this book. I advice you to read it before you go on to the presentations of the actual attack forms.

Tables of techniques

This book contains tables of the aikido techniques, combined with the basic attack forms. The tables indicate the level of difficulty for each combination of attack form and aikido technique. There are also some comprised explanations and pointers.

In the tables, I have tried to be as complete as is reasonable, including all the basic combinations – and a lot of not so basic ones.

Aikido is a vast system of techniques. The basic pinings and throws are not that many, but several of them have both an *omote* and an *ura* form, often differing substantially. Also, each technique is slightly modified depending on what attack it is used against. So, the aikido curriculum ends up consisting of a few thousand more or less different techniques.

I have included the tables to show this complexity, and also to arrange it somewhat systematically. I hope that it is of some use to aikido practitioners.

Glossary

The book ends with a dictionary of aikido terminology, where the Japanese terms used in aikido are listed and explained shortly. Some of the terms are from other martial arts, but have a certain relevance also for aikido practitioners.

This is the same glossary as the one already published in my book *Aikido: The Peaceful Martial Art*. I included it here too, for the convenience of the reader.

The terminology of aikido is not an exact science. Some names are not used the same way in different aikido styles. Mostly in this glossary, when relevant, I present the meaning applied by the Hombu Dojo of Aikikai.

Another inconsistency is the transcription of the terms, i.e. how they are spelled with western letters. The spelling commonly used in aikido is in many cases different from the one used by linguists and Japanologists. This is true already for the word aikido, which should actually be spelled *aikidou* or *aikidô*.

These anomalies of the aikido terminology stem from its emergence through aikido practice in many different parts of the world, where the terms were transcribed sort of sluggishly, with little consideration of linguistics. Already at the Hombu Dojo, the aikido terms were initially treated without much systematic concern.

Maybe this will change in the future, if some standard is produced and established internationally – at least for English transcription, and hopefully for what techniques should have what names. Certainly, there are inconsistencies with the terminology for the attack forms as well. In this book, though, I have tried to use the most widely accepted and accurate terms. When this has not been possible, I mention it in the comments about the techniques. The glossary, too, contains alternative terms where such are widely used.