



Kenshinryu

流神劍

TRADITIONS FOR THE FUTURE

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Kancho's Corner

Two Ways of Learning

Analysis... the separating of any material or abstract entity into its constituent elements

Synthesis... the combining of the constituent elements of separate material or abstract entities into a single or unified entity

Over 26 years of teaching I've watched people study Aikido and Shinto Muso Ryu and attempt to apply a variety of methods to understand and integrate the complexities of the practice... and I've done so myself. In my own case, I wouldn't say that I was very methodical as a student of martial arts, especially in my younger years. I don't recall particularly thinking about how I was learning... I just assumed that hard and regular training would result in being able to remember and apply the many instructions, drills and kata. I was always more than a little obsessed with the arts – doing my own training outside class, reading a great deal, watching movies, attending seminars, comparing notes with friends and other students who trained – but never being cerebral about how I could maximise learning.

In many ways this might have been a good thing because I was just letting the practice happen without my intellect getting in the way. I saw others who struggled with this - wanting perfection there and then – and definitely overthinking rather than enjoying the experience. These people seemed to drop out of class with greater frequency, so somewhere in there I guess I was learning just to train, enjoy the feelings in my body that came from training and also enjoy the camaraderie of people who were happy to push their limits.

All that changed when I started teaching. Suddenly I was faced with a sense of responsibility for the learning of others. In fact I not only took responsibility for their learning but for their whole experience... big mistake! In those early years I would greet all beginners with glee and pour everything I could into them. It was only after about 3 years that I finally realised that if I continued down this path I would burn out and the Dojo could never be sustainable. I hadn't had the role models of a Nishioka Sensei, Saito Sensei or an Inoue Sensei to draw from – my teachers to that point, for all their considerable efforts, had not been full time professionals or really even masters of their art. So I had to have my own realisation and it was slow coming, but in the end I was able to state clearly that "I care completely however I'm completely unattached at the exact same time".

I now knew that students were responsible for their learning and I was responsible for my teaching... and that was that.

Around this time I met Joe Thambu Sensei who ran a successful full time Dojo, then I travelled to Japan to study at the Yoshinkan Honbu and Iwama Dojos and then eventually came in under Nishioka Sensei. Each of these people contributed to how I teach now, the feel and etiquette of our Dojo (the things I will and won't stand for) and also the fact I developed a deep interest in how people learn. There have been many years of studying that aspect from different directions, experimenting with a multitude of teaching 'styles', observing what styles work for different people and why, learning how to structure an adult class or a seminar (very different), a Junior class (also different) and how to create a certain flow across a year of training or even across the many years that constitute certain students journeys into teachers in their own right.

There's a book in all of that (one day maybe) but I'd like to focus on one small facet in this article and that's the relationship between analysis and synthesis. I'd say that people often have a predilection towards one or the other approach and without wanting to generalise too much, I've definitely observed a difference between students in Japan and students in the West. Which way do you lean? Do you tend to ask a lot of questions of your teachers, fellow students and yourself? People will experience Budo training for a period of time then at some point many will strive to analyse the experience, breaking it down into components because they believe this will simplify things and help them to better understand what they have been doing. My experience is that analysis doesn't actually simplify anything at all. It's a useful approach for categorising the various components of the experience but that doesn't make something more comprehensible. I'm not talking about individual techniques. These benefit from being performed slowly and in steps to achieve sound technique and appropriate sequencing with your partner much in the same way that we need to practice chords first before we can build them into a flowing musical piece. Bujutsu / Budo doesn't lend itself to a reductionist approach in the opinion of Nishioka Sensei. He spoke of the need to train consciously and with an open mind saying that this approach allows an eventual understanding of the whole to rise naturally and without effort. This is a bit of a difficult thing to put into words but my experience has been a lot like that – sudden comprehension like the sun coming up and flooding light on what was only dimly perceived. Suddenly we just see the whole. And the whole is greater than the sum of its parts – a reality that can best be grasped via synthesis.

David

Important Aikido Concepts (part 4)

I then connect these three strategies to the stages of learning described in the concept of 'Shu (learn the form) / Ha (break the form) / Ri (create the form)'.

Those who have mastered any trade will recognise Shu/Ha/Ri as

Shu – how to do it the way it is done

Ha – how to do it the way it isn't done

Ri – how to do it the way (when) it can't be done

I do also conceptually link the 3 strategies to timing. (**sen, sensen no sen, go no sen**)

These timings are then directly linked to **Tenkan, Omote and Irimi** and determine the way the technique unfolds because of the relationship between uke and shitei in terms of the way power and speed differ under each of these timings.

Irimi – to enter – preemptive. Uke has decided to attack, breathes in and muscles / tendons / ki contracts in preparation – shitei counters at that precise moment as the ki withdraws. Requires Uke to give physical and breath signals in the early stages to learn it. Requires that shitei closes the maai.

Omote – to the front – aware / equal timing/force/speed. Uke attacks and shitei meets that attack equally, releases the line while maintaining the maai and leads uke to their front.

Tenkan (Ura) – to turn (or move behind). Shitei opens the maai as the attack unfolds encouraging uke to move across the space.

The next key point is called **Te no Uchi**. This literally means the inside of the hand and I believe that this is quintessential to understanding and practising Aiki arts.

The two shapes for attack are **Honte** (true / natural) and **Gyakute** (back / opposite). Honte is where the focus of power is in the little finger side of the hand, while gyakute stresses power in the thumb side. My direct experience is that Aikido cannot take place without a clear understanding on the part of both uke and shitei of the ramifications of these positions.

These underpin shape, line of power and elbow/hip relationship. Attacks from honte where the shitei tries to direct the elbow outside will go against the line of power and vice versa.

Critically, the lack of a serious study of swordsmanship alongside Aikido has diminished this understanding until it is now rarely seen or experienced. (Even though I have studied it, I do not include Aiki ken as a 'serious study of swordsmanship')

I believe most basic techniques (not just nage waza) comprise three phases –

Kuzushi (balance break), **Tsukuri** (prepare positionally) and **Take** (attack / apply). My experience is these don't always follow this particular order. It is also my experience that we need to be aware of what we are trying to achieve during technique and how it relates to the above sequence. I believe that this can be applied to that conundrum of 'what is effective?' in Aikido. With reasonable experience and full consciousness of what we are doing, we can 'make it work!' I don't mean by physical force – I mean by **creative force**. This is worth consideration especially for those who wish to teach.

It is also critical to understand that the above conditions of Irimi, Omote and Tenkan are not strict rules – I believe they suggest and describe the principle by which Aiki is effected. Capture the moment of the attack and use up our opponents energy in the way that is appropriate and harmonious to that occasion. There really are no rules. We need to learn and study these things until we can completely forget them!

How can we learn / embody these things and finally 'forget' them? What conditions need to prevail for this to take place?

I refer you to an article written by my teacher which has been published in the excellent book titled "Sword & Spirit" Classical Warrior Traditions of Japan Vol 2 by Dianne Skoss. The article is headed "Uchidachi and Shidachi". Nishioka Sensei eloquently explains the critical element that is absent in so much Bujutsu / Budo and how restoring this balance can bring our practice back to what he sees as its path.

Life Hacks

Thoughts on Burdens

If I were asked to take *seigan no kamae* with a sword, the last thing I would think about would be the weight of the sword (A sword only weighs around 2 kg after all). The absolute weight doesn't matter. It really depends on how long I try to hold it. If I hold it for a minute, that's not a problem.... If I hold it for an hour, my body may start to ache....If I hold it for a day, I'll need an ambulance.

In each case, it's the same weight, but the longer I hold it, the heavier it becomes. And that's the way it is with stress. If we carry our burdens all the time, sooner or later, as the burden becomes increasingly heavy, we won't be able to carry on. As with the sword, we have to be able to put it down for a while and rest before holding it again. When we're refreshed, we can carry on.

So, before you return home tonight put down any burdens you are carrying. Don't carry them home. You can pick them up tomorrow ... **if they are still needing to be picked up.** Whatever burdens you're carrying now, put them down for a moment if you can. Relax ... pick them up later after you've rested.

There are a couple of other things to consider. If I'm able to 'move freely' and 'play with the sword' it will seem less of a burden. If I love carrying something, it isn't as heavy. We can take pride in our ability to 'support' and the load will seem much lighter.

Life's great. Enjoy

David Dangerfield



Spring Gasshuku

Kenshinryu recently hosted our Spring Shinto-Musō Ryu Jodo Gasshuku (合宿: training camp or communal learning). As anyone who attended can attest, it was a great success, with students travelling from as far as Marrickville, Armidale, Canberra and Lismore to participate. Huge thanks must of course be given to Tamara, Alyce and Josie (and our other volunteer cooks) for the impressive breakfasts and lunches that made training all day possible.

A Gasshuku is truly a special way of training. Total immersion in the syllabus under the guidance of an instructor brings a deeper understanding of technique, while rote practice ingrains it into your body. It's the community aspect, however, that is a particular highlight of a Gasshuku; so many people united in learning a specific (and technically complex!) system. A truly group effort.

A noticeable improvement was to everyone's Uchi-komi, particularly Honte, Gyakute and Hiki-otoshi. A better cutting sound suggests better grip and hopefully a better understanding of our Kesa cutting line (Hasuji). Everyone is to be congratulated on their hard work and contributions, but the self-development and improved technique is the true reward.

Look forward to seeing everyone at the next Gasshuku!

Aaron.



[Please click here to see all the Photos and Videos from the Gasshuku.](#)



Technique Workshop

Shomen Tsuki Gokajo Osae Tenkan



1. Face your partner in Ai Hanmi



2. As Uke prepares to Tsuki, step in and place pressure to draw out the attack



3. As Uke attacks perform irimi tenkan and deliver ura ken atemi to Ukes face



4. Following the direction of Ukes arm step forward grasping the wrist and further off balancing Uke

Technique Workshop continued...



5. Pivot strongly making only a small circle with your hand turning ukes arm and upper body over



6. Step to the rear taking Ukes elbow and control them placing your knee at their armpit



7. Ensure Uke is secured on the ground



8. Apply the Gokajo Osae

Inspirational corner



NEVER GIVE UP ON YOUR DREAMS!



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