

Sword and Spirit

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— Why Budo? —

**Regardless of the times
you live in, or the
circumstances of your life,
success largely depends on
things you actually can
control:**

- **Building strong relationships in a community of achievement.**
- **Forging a disciplined and positive mindset.**
- **Enhancing your physical health and capabilities.**

*These are exactly the
benefits membership in a
dojo provides.*

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Deflecting Strikes

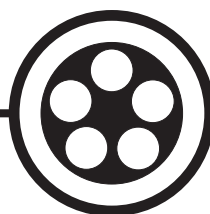
Part One — Traditional Applications in Aikijutsu

In any engagement there is a limited volume of space that *must* be defended. The exact nature of the space can vary widely depending on the number of opponents and the type of weapons in play, but can be defined most simply in terms of two, unarmed opponents, the usual situation in the training methodology of aikijutsu. Properly placed within the overall category of jujutsu, aikijutsu is a sophisticated form of arms-length grappling aiming at both mechanical and psychological manipulation, and consequently control, of the opponent.

Effective practice, let alone practical application of aikijutsu techniques, is dependent on establishing a connection to the opponent by means of which his posture, options, and will to continue the fight can be impaired or destroyed. At the highest levels of practice, the connection to the opponent might not be purely (or at all) physical, at least if some demonstrations are to be believed, but for purposes of this discussion only physical connections will be considered.

To understand how to establish a connection, particularly with a person in active opposition, it's first necessary to comprehend the spatial relationship between the opponents and the consequent zones that must be defended. Imagine two opponents facing each other, square-on. If one opponent touches his fingertips together on the centerline at arm's length, that triangular space within (and including) the arms defines the zone that must be defended, because only attacks penetrating the defined boundary have the potential to land.

If the defender is not facing his opponent square-on, the zone is defined by the width of the defender's shoulders with the apex of the triangle at arm's length on the center line between the opponents. It should be apparent that the shape of the triangle can change with the angle at which the defender is standing. Note as well that the zone extends from the ground to well above the top of the defender's head.



Next, consider the stages through which an aikijutsu technique develops (assuming the defender is not struck or otherwise taken down by the opponent's attack). *Irimi*, or "entering," is closing the distance to the opponent. Once in contact, interfering with further movement on the part of the opponent is accomplished by *kuzushi*, "off-balancing," or "breaking down" the posture of the opponent, or by "fixing" the posture of the opponent in place. The subsequent interval is filled by *kake*, positioning to execute the technique, while the engagement is concluded by the execution of the throw, take down, or joint lock.

The trick, though, is not getting hit, before or during all the stages of the defensive technique. Training to accomplish this goal requires credible attacks against which to practice, something sadly lacking in some schools of martial arts. To be fair, there are schools making no claim to combative effectiveness, focusing instead on the healthful and social aspects of practice, and no criticism whatsoever is intended of training presented in that manner. In other cases, however, claims to martial effectiveness are made, without merit, because techniques are never practiced against realistic attacks or non-compliant partners. Overly stylized "attacks" and collusion by training partners with ineffective techniques, in schools making claims to practical utility, compromise the integrity of martial arts—not to mention the safety of the students.

An example of unrealistic training is "catching" a punch during its extension. While an untrained opponent might conceivably make a lumbering, overly committed strike that is sufficiently slow or awkward to permit the attacking arm being grabbed on the way in, it makes little sense to train assuming the best possible circumstances under which one might have to defend oneself. It's far more reasonable to assume the worst case—a skilled and determined opponent—and train accordingly.

More realistically, if a strike can be made to miss, it is possible to connect with the attacking arm as the punch is being retracted, particularly if the attempt to form the connection is combined with an entry. Provided the opponent's strike is thwarted and an entry is accomplished, there should be an opportunity for execution of an aikijutsu technique (usually prefaced by a strike—or strikes—to effect, maintain, or exacerbate impaired posture in the opponent).

Application of a deflection is one means to thwart a strike and facilitate entry to grappling range. A deflection is both more and less than a simple parry. Less, because absolutely minimal impedance of the incoming strike is intended; more, because the technique facilitates closing with the opponent and opening a line of counter-attack. To illustrate these distinctions, the foundation of the deflection as a technique must be considered.

Aiki-taiso Suri-age: A Solo Movement Pattern

Solo practice has utility in the development of combative skills primarily for the refinement of idealized, physical actions. The idealized movement patterns can be adapted as receptions of attacks, in some cases as means of disengagement or even as strikes, or as components of techniques, all in addition to the use of off-balancing the opponent. Many of the movement patterns would be familiar to any student of modern aikido, in addition to practitioners of aikijutsu.

One of the most fundamental aiki-taiso is called *Suri-age* (Sliding up), and is performed as follows:

The student assumes *sankakudai*, the triangular platform described in previous issues, with the arms hanging in relaxed curves by the sides. The wrists are

flexed slightly to the rear to induce a bit of potential energy in those joints.



Releasing the tension in the wrists (*ki-age*), which causes the arms to start forward...



...the student allows his arms to swing upward. Primary power comes from lowering the scapula and insofar as possible minimizing involvement of the shoulders. The student follows the swing of the arms by moving forward with *tsugi-ashi*, a sliding step. It's critical throughout the movements to keep the hips canted forward—think of the navel pointing downward—rather than arching the back as the arms swing in such a way as to point the navel upward. Doing so will substantially decrease the connection to the ground and resulting power.



The student cuts down from the wrists (*ki-sage*)...



...has the arms lowered by a sense of compression along the front of the body...



...and slides with *tsugi-ashi* to the rear, returning to the starting position.

This exercise should be repeated in both a right and left side lead configuration, with the knowledge the arm performing a deflection in application could be either arm, or both arms in sequence, regardless of the lead side foot. (In application, it's sometimes most desirable to use the rear arm for deflection, to free the lead hand to apply a strike or grasp the opponent to assert a connection.)



Lead-hand Application: Shomen-uchi Aiki-nage

Demonstrating the technique as a formal kata, *uke* (the person receiving the technique; i.e., the “attacker”) and *nage* (the person executing the technique; i.e., the “defender”) start in middle-level guards.



Nage “lures” the attack by lowering his hands and leaning slightly forward slightly to expose his head. *Uke* steps back with his right foot and raises his right arm in preparation to strike.



As *uke* steps forward and strikes for *nage*'s forehead, *nage* shifts forward and angles his body slightly (about 15-degrees) to receive the attack with his right arm, aiming for the insertion of the deltoid muscle in *uke*'s right shoulder. This deflection is called *aiki-dome* (stopping with aiki), and is one of four variations of that reception. The curvature of *nage*'s arm is adjusted such that the strike dies out at about the point of *nage*'s elbow, with *uke* being floated and tipped to his left-front corner.



Continuing his entry, nage secures uke's head by bringing his left hand to the base of uke's skull and his upper right arm to uke's jaw.



As he turns, nage lowers his hips to accelerate uke. Almost instantly following the entry, nage's right arm should start to spiral upward to turn uke's head and take the slack from his neck.



Nage raises his center and commences a slight pivot to his left which, if everything has been done correctly, will be enough to throw uke as his feet come out from under him. ***Danger—this is a potentially lethal move!*** The technique is designed to break uke's neck. Allow space between the right arm/shoulder and uke's head so that he can execute *ukemi* (his breakfall, to escape the technique). As uke completes his ukemi, nage continues his turn to the left and steps forward with his right foot, finishing in a deep zenkutsu dachi.



Rear-hand Application: Shomen-uchi Kote-gaeshi

The more advanced techniques in aikijutsu are set up differently than those introductory techniques practiced as formal kata. Nage receives the attack in more natural posture.



As uke steps forward and strikes for nage's forehead...



...nage steps forward with his left foot and applies aikido with his rear (right) arm.



Nage pivots to his right to face the same direction as uke, sweeping around with his right foot and dropping his left hand down, onto uke's wrist.



Stepping back with his left foot as he brings his right hand into position on the edge of uke's hand, nage applies the kote-gaeshi.

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In the next issue of this journal, we'll explore self-defense applications against the types of strikes more likely to be encountered in the modern world. 🌀

