

Sword and Spirit

The eNewsletter of Itten Dojo

April 2017



— 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 things membership in a dojo provides.

Copyright 2017 Itten Dojo, Inc.
701 W Simpson Street, Suite C
Mechanicsburg, PA 17055-3716
www.ittendojo.org

Life Hacks from the Martial Arts...

“Be the Change...”

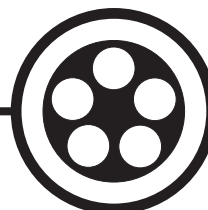
Ironic Application; Important Lesson

Often attributed to Mahatma Gandhi (probably incorrectly — the quote seems to have come from a new-agey book published in the 1970s), “Be the change you want to see in the world” is a sentiment with which he would most likely have agreed. The quote would also likely resonate with practitioners of modern, Ueshiba-ha aikido, considering the emphasis of many branches of that art on harmony and spiritual enlightenment. As described in my essay “Spiritual Budo,” from the February 2017 issue of *Sword and Spirit*, those of us training at Itten Dojo tend to take a different view of the proper place of spiritual development and confine our spirit-oriented practice within the dojo primarily to building greater focus and stronger intent. Nevertheless, “Be the change you want to see in the world,” applied somewhat ironically in the context of Yamate-ryu aikijutsu, can serve as a metaphor to illustrate a key principle of the art, a principle that is counter-intuitive and very difficult for most new students to grasp. Successful application of this principle transforms practice as well as the practical effectiveness of the art, and can provide insight to a means of dealing with the challenges of life.

At its heart, Yamate-ryu aikijutsu is an art of manipulation of an opponent, with the goal of domination. The manipulation can be physical, mental/emotional, or spiritual, or a combination of all three. For the sake of simplicity, we’ll focus on physical examples that will be more obvious to persons not training in martial arts.

One aspect of physical manipulation is control, in Japanese, *osae*. In *The Way and the Power*, F. J. Lovret notes that, “The original purpose of *osae* was to restrict an enemy’s motion,” and one of the key methods to accomplish control is through the strategy of *kuzushi*, “the action of breaking down the posture of your enemy.” *Kuzushi* is often defined as “off-balancing,” but the reality can be both more subtle and complex, and is achieved by affecting the skeletal alignment of the opponent.

Continued on next page



Students of Yamate-ryu are introduced to this strategy very early in their training, through a two-person sword form and the first technique in the curriculum.



Figure 1

In the *Tachi-no-kata* (sword form) “*Ki-no-musubi*,” (Spirits tied-together), an attempted “attack” is thwarted by cutting the attacker’s wrist as depicted in Figure 1. The important thing to notice is how the posture of the “attacker” (in the white jacket) is a mirror-image of the posture of the “defender” (in the blue jacket). The attacker is put into that position by virtue of what the defender does internally, to himself, rather than by what the defender tries to do directly to the opponent.

The first unarmed technique in the curriculum is *Shomen-uchi Ude-osae*, and is closely related to *Ki-no-musubi*. In this technique, the attacker raises his arm to strike the defender on the forehead. As the arm is raised, the defender enters, inducing *kuzushi* in the attacker and shaping the attacker’s arm in a manner that facilitates dislocating the attacker’s shoulder (Figure 2). Again, notice the mirror-image nature of the respective postures of attacker and defender. If the defender attempts to achieve this domination by directly pushing on the attacker, the defense will fail (Figure 3).



Figure 2



Figure 3

Continued on next page



The defender configures himself in a very specific manner, and it results in a predictable control of the opponent — an ironic application of “Be the change you want to see in the world.”

Manipulating the opponent by manipulating yourself is one of the most significant lessons in Yamate-ryu aikijutsu, and one that has broad application outside the dojo. The truth is, in this life, the one thing over which we — potentially — have most control, is ourselves. This control

can be trained and strengthened. In building a stronger, more disciplined spirit, in purposely shaping our internal, mental/emotional configuration, we can be better prepared to deal with opportunity, challenge, or adversity in our lives.

And this preparation, above and beyond better health and fitness, an enjoyable hobby, and practical self-defense skills, is the highest and truest value of training in Japanese budo. ☸

Robert Wolfe, the chief instructor at Itten Dojo, began martial arts training in 1975, has taught since 1985, and holds senior ranks in Itto Tenshin-ryu kenjutsu, Yamate-ryu aikijutsu, and Isshinryu karate. He has published numerous articles addressing the martial arts in a variety of periodicals, ranging from popular magazines such as *Inside Karate*, *Martial Arts Training*, and *Aikido Today Magazine*, to internationally distributed, academic publications such as the *Journal of Asian Martial Arts*.

A Tip for Those Training

One of the things I enjoy most about training in Yamate-ryu aikijutsu is the incredible depth of the art, and the way in which the art continually unfolds to reveal its intricacies. I’ve often mentioned to persons interviewing for admission to the dojo that aikijutsu practices are like laboratory experiments in which you are both the experimenter and the experiment itself. Approached with this mindset, there are very few trips to the dojo that do not result in some new insight to a specific technique, the overall art, or — most importantly — to oneself.

The featured essay in this month’s edition came from an off-hand remark I made during practice several weeks ago. Since then, thanks to my own focus on the concepts described in the essay, my technical ability made a minor leap — and then hit a snag that led to additional understanding.

After accomplishing my best ever execution of a particular technique I tried again several days later with a different training partner and couldn’t complete the throw. I thought about “be the change…” and decided to try moving a small component of the technique from the point of the throw at the end to the point of initial contact with the opponent at the beginning, shaping my own hand appropriately. Wham! Down went the training partner. And every subsequent throw was the same.

So now, in addition to thinking even more about how I configure myself, I’m thinking about techniques in a more holistic fashion. Techniques have component pieces, and new students are properly encouraged to focus on those components, but it seems that eventually one’s focus must shift to be more encompassing, to consider the entire process or interaction as a whole, without segmenting a sequence into discrete portions and assigning greater importance to some than others. And yet, the outcome does matter — at the completion of a technique, we want control or compromise of the opponent. What we focus on, in the dojo or in life, determines success. ☸

