

Seidokan Aikido: An Evolutionary Step for Aikido

By: Robert Frankovich, Nidan
(Seidokan Aikido)

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“The Art of Peace” has been developing since Morihei Ueshiba, also known as O’Sensei, first decided that Bujutsu (military arts) was not the direction he intended for his life’s work. Satsu Jin Ken, “the killing sword,” was the way of the military arts. It has its basis in the battlefield techniques of the Samurai, the soldiers of feudal era Japan. Ueshiba brought his art out of the feudal age by minimizing the martial aspects. Katsu Jin Ken became a concept used within the art. Literally meaning the “winning sword,” Katsu Jin Ken has come to be “the sword to let live.” This concept, and the Principles of Loving Protection for All Things, is part of Aikido’s foundation.

Ueshiba gained an insight and enlightenment after a duel with a Kendo master in which he subdued his opponent without causing harm. Ueshiba was able to accomplish this by not becoming an attacker himself. By defending only, he was able to sense what his opponent’s attack would be and then act accordingly. This helped lead him to what he had been training for all of his life. The principle of “Aiki” is to be “one with” or “part of” all that is around you – everything, everyone, and all life’s energy (Ki). This was the birth of Takemusu Aiki – Aiki born out of martial art.

Many Aikido systems still believe that Takemusu Aiki means that the techniques of Aikido should still be done as the Samurai had done hundreds of years ago. This keeps techniques hard and, often, painful. This can be seen in the extra pressure placed on wrists & shoulders and in the high number of breakfalls taken by Uke (the person being thrown). According to Shihan Roderick Kobayashi, founder of Seidokan Aikido, this is not the intention of Takemusu Aiki. The interpretation used within Seidokan Aikido is that

Aikijutsu, the martial art, was simply the parent of modern Aikido. Kobayashi-sensei believed that Ueshiba began the progression away from being an art of destruction into an art of compassion and caring.

Kobayashi spoke of the continuous evolution of Aikido by the founder and the continued development of the art by some of its greatest teachers. An example of this evolution can be found in a teaching of Koichi Tohei, one of Ueshiba's best students and Kobayashi-sensei's principle teacher. At a Shihan (Masters) class in 1980, Tohei told a student who was working on Shomenuchi (strike to the forehead) Kokyu-nage (breath throw) to "cut down the elbow." This statement became a concept that intrigued Kobayashi. For years prior to this revelation, techniques had focused on controlling the forearm, which is strong and hard to control. Moving the application of the technique to the elbow allows a smoother, softer finish follows more closely with the principles of Aikido such as "Proper Use of Ki."

Control of the elbow, both Uke's and Nage's (person throwing the attacker), has become an evolutionary concept in Seidokan Aikido. Applying the technique to the elbow of Uke takes less energy to complete and creates a more consistently effective application. When the elbow of Uke is dropped, it causes Uke to be taken off balance easily and it helps prevent Nage's hand from slipping off during the technique. It causes Uke's elbow to bend, creating a natural stopping point. This can be seen in techniques like Ryokatadori Hijiotoshi (a double lapel grab defended against by an elbow drop) – figures 1-1 through 1-5

and Yokomenuchi Hiji-otsohi (a strike to the side of the head defended against by an elbow drop) – figures 2-1 through 2-3.



figure 1-1

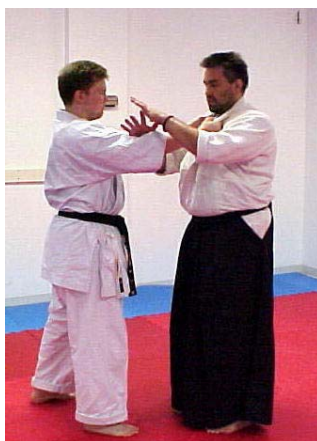


figure 1-2



figure 1-3



figure 1-4

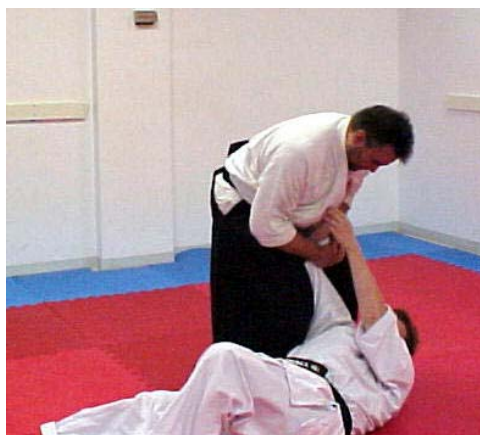


figure 1-5

Another example of the effectiveness of controlling Uke's elbow is Sankyo. Sankyo is an effective wristlock but it is an uncertainty if attempting to apply pain. If any slack occurs in Uke's elbow, it is ineffective as a control hold and takedown. Only by leading the elbow in the direction in which it is pointing will the technique work well. This version maintains the principles of Aikido, unlike the version that uses pain compliance.



figure 2-1



figure 2-2



figure 2-3

Control of the elbow is an important factor in performing the techniques. Nage, when attacked, must control the movements of their own elbow to ensure that a technique is applied properly. This can be shown in Shomenuchi Kokyu-nage. If Nage's elbows are up, the technique will not work. This is because muscle is being applied to Uke's elbow, which allows Uke to find the point of contact for the technique and permit a counter technique. Since muscle is being applied, the technique does not follow Aikido principles, specifically the Unification of Mind and Body – “settle down” and “keep weight underside” and Range of Effectiveness. When Nage allows their elbow to drop, it creates enough extra energy (Ki) in the system of attack/defense to unbalance Uke without giving Uke the opportunity to find the technique and counter it. This movement also naturally brings Nage's arm back well within their own Range of Effectiveness.

Control of Nage's elbow is also visible when defending against a grab. The application of Katatedori Nikyo (a same side wrist grab defended by the “second” wrist lock) is a good example. If Nage attempts to raise his hand, they may run into Uke's strength and must counter the strength by using more of their own. This becomes a test of strength. In order to avoid the use of strength, Nage can slightly lower the elbow of the grabbed arm, then lift

the entire arm. Lower the elbow changes the angle of force, putting the advantage on Nage's side. This is a direct application of the Principle of Aiki, also known as the Principle of Oneness.

All of these examples illustrate that it is "being Aiki" that is more important than having "strong Ki." Being Aiki allows for more blending and harmonious movement that can control situations through smaller, softer techniques rather than using strong Ki in big techniques while hoping you don't run into stronger Ki.

Seidokan also uses some of Ueshiba's doka (song of the Way) within its techniques and principles. There are five that have been adopted (and adapted to fit today's world) as part of Seidokan. One applies directly to the techniques used within the system. Ueshiba wrote, "When an enemy comes running and strikes, take one step aside and cut immediately." Although today's world doesn't usually involve sword fights, the concept still work. Seidokan has interpreted this doka in the following manner: "cut immediately is referring to applying the simplest, quickest technique to control the situation. Hitoashi Yokete, "Take One Step Aside," has been added to the list of principles that are Seidokan Aikido

While the world continues to evolve, Seidokan Aikido will try to evolve with it. This will be done by following the principles of Aikido and through sharing the art with others. While we revere our heritage and tradition, they should not prevent growth. O'Sensei set the pace for the development of Aikido. This is shown in his techniques, which became more

effective throughout his training, and through his discussions about the principles.

Sometimes growth can cause hesitation due to the dislike for change, but staying with the principles ensures that the development will continue along the proper path.

Growth in no way ruins the art. People and their politics do that. Prior to his untimely death on June 17th, 1995, Kobayashi-sensei often said, "Share what you have learned and continue helping Aikido grow." His intention was to create a strong art that will endure when practiced sincerely, realistically and earnestly...which happens to be the meaning of the "Sei," or makoto, in Seidokan.