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Aikido Australia



*Tai No Henka - Master Disciple Relationship - Ukemi - Zen Healing
Aikido helps Grace get more from life*

Tai No Henka

By John Litchen



**Sugano Sensei often says Aikido is about contact.
The moment contact is initiated movement begins**

Correct Maai is created at the moment of contact when movement begins to lead Uke into a position where balance is upset, opening the possibility for a technique to be created.

One only has to watch a master like Sugano Shihan in action to see that his timing is always perfect. When he demonstrates the Tai No Henka exercises from gyaku hanmi katatori at the start of every National school he explains about leading the opponent into a vacuum the instant he thinks he has grabbed the proffered wrist.

Once the opponent's balance becomes precarious a seemingly effortless shift in body position by Nage will result in the opponent having no option but to take gravity assisted Ukemi for his own protection.

I recall Sensei saying that we should make use of the power in the universe, that we stand between heaven and earth and that if we make our connection to the earth very strong by sinking our centre, gravity will create the throw we want Uke to take.

Look closely when Sensei demonstrates and you will see this in action. You will also see how perfect Sensei's timing is. No matter how fast or slowly Uke grabs, the moment his fingers reach Sensei's wrist, Sensei is turning tenkan and leading Uke forward while Uke's mind is still focussing on grabbing. As uke starts to realise his grip is not quite there, still focussing on the grabbing, he naturally extends a little to tighten his grip. It is in this instant his balance is taken and he finds himself in a position to be thrown. Gravity is drawing him down, and a slight shift by Sensei, or a minor extension will send Uke into a fall. At this point Sensei pauses

The point of the exercise is not the throw, (This will come later.) but the timing of the contact between Nage and Uke.

The Tai No Henka movement comes so naturally to Sensei that its complexity is hidden by its apparent simplicity.

Sensei always has us practice this exercise at the beginning of every National school, usually in three different ways all of which have different timing.

Why does he do this?

I've heard people say, "This is boring — I wish he'd get onto something more interesting." And they go through the movement without focus, without concentrating, and obviously without understanding.

Practicing Tai No Henka is absolutely fundamental to the understanding of timing and distancing, of harmonising and blending one's movement with that of different opponents, and of reading body language and intention.

Practicing Tai No Henka with the right focus is the start to opening the mind to the infinite possibilities and techniques such a simple movement allows.

It is never boring.

We should do much more, not less of it.



The Master Disciple Relationship

By Hugh Derham.

Paolo Coelho is the bestselling author of several books with a mystical bent. He has been the student and disciple of a number of mystical practices. In his book “The Pilgrimage” he relates the story of following a master on a pilgrimage across the North of Spain to Compostela, a medieval pilgrim route. On the way he learns various lessons.

One lesson in particular was learned by climbing a waterfall.

They surveyed the waterfall from below, then his master dived into the water and climbed up, emerging at the top, laughing. He had made his way entirely behind the curtain of water, so that although Coelho could see he was making progress, he could not see how he accomplished any of the important details.

Coelho’s turn then came. He realised as soon as he got under the fall that it had much more force than he had thought. He described this as being brought back to a sense of reality — “the sense that weakens us at the moment when we most need to have faith in our powers.” He passed behind the falling water to avoid the worst of the force, and found climbing was not too hard. But when he reached near the top, he had to get through the torrent of water. He was nearly overwhelmed by the force and noise, and was tempted to give up and go to a place he sensed where “there would no longer be any need for the superhuman effort it took, there would only be rest and peace.” He brings his head up through the water, finds nothing to hold on to; also he cannot see his Master and realises the Master will not save him if he slips. He is on his own. He then allows one hand to be “like a fish”, at one with the water, and the hand is assisted by the force of the water to find a hidden rock to hold on to. He finally pulls himself up through the waterfall, gets to the bank and falls into an exhausted sleep.

His Master had told him initially: “I will make the climb without your being able to see where I place my hands and feet. In the same way, a disciple such as you can never imitate his guide’s steps. You have your own way of living your life, of dealing with problems, and of winning. Teaching [by the Master] is only demonstrating that it is possible. Learning is making it possible for yourself.”

This is remarkably clear story of how a Master shows the disciple. A teacher, on the other hand, might explain each handhold, giving a mechanical guided lesson. This would result in a student who is limited to doing exactly what he has been taught, with no problem solving skills, no ability to vary his skill in the face of unexpected difficulties or variations in the challenge he faces.

If the Master simply showed his skill to every casual traveller who passed, it would be little more than a sideshow, with a master craftsman prostituting his trade for the idle curious. A Master is more likely to reserve his demonstration for those he has found, through the experience of an ongoing relationship, to be worthy of teaching and in need of the skill(s) involved. We then see the value of the Master/Disciple relationship, as well as a model of transmitting the knowledge and skills.

In the Aikido world in ordinary classes we see a mixture of teacher/student technical training, and some demonstration of skills, which can only be imagined by lesser students.



However, when we train with someone as advanced as Sugano Sensei, we can experience the Master/Disciple relationship, if we have an ongoing relationship with him. It is then up to each of us who wishes to be Sensei’s student to train, solve the problems and overcome the difficulties in our own way, according to our own discoveries.

By means of the Master’s example and our own rigorous training we can achieve the barely imaginable and have the potential to become Masters ourselves one day.



UKEMI

Being aware and more considerate.

By Mark Matcott

In the movie *The Shootist*, Ron Howard plays a teenage admirer of an aging gunfighter, John Wayne, dying of cancer. (Wayne was actually dying of cancer when the movie was made). The young man asks the gunfighter how he survived so many shoot-outs. Wayne's profound insight was: "it's all about being willing. The moment you are no longer willing is the day the bullet finds you."

I think to *take ukemi* we have to be *wholeheartedly* willing. Holding some part back means that we will not get what we should be getting out of it.

During the 2003 Summer School, Sugano Shihan said that being attentive and focussed - while also being relaxed - are basic to Aikido practice. He also said that euphemisms like "*positive extension of Ki*" could also be called aggression.

Getting these things going, without feeling that they are contradictory, is a challenge for us if we want to be good at taking ukemi. Can we be aggressive and relaxed at the same time?

Being willing, and paying attention, are aspects of receiving that are also taught in other martial arts, but the unique thing about Aikido is that the receiver is not playing a "loser" role, then swapping over to a "winner" role. It's precisely because Uke and Nage are sharing the experience of a throw, that taking ukemi raises awareness to a higher level.

One way to see this is to compare practising Aikido with playing chess. In chess, the adversary keeps making moves that suggest potential power to be used later on. In Aikido we are dealing with actual energy, to be perceived right now. This requires a very different kind of awareness.

It's why we mustn't just put up with being thrown, waiting for our turn to be the 'boss'. While being thrown, we get the opportunity to develop our perception and intuitive responses. We get a chance to study the thrower's energy by feeling it. We also get the opportunity to feel what is happening with our own energy.

It's important for Nage not to short-change Uke in this learning process. It's very easy to begin to do a throw at a certain speed, and then suddenly accelerate the pace so that Uke looks and feels clumsy. In real life fighting, this sort of sudden change of pace does indeed happen. But for the sake of getting maximum benefit from Aikido training, I think it's best for Uke to attack at his/her own chosen speed, with Nage doing the throw at *that* speed. It's more respectful and beneficial to Uke.

As we become better balanced and more confident, we will naturally attack faster. Remember, we are not throwing people just for our own training. We are throwing people for their training too. If we are going to play with unexpected changes of pace, we should agree on it between each other first.

Another question I think we should always be asking ourselves is how what we do on the mat relates to our day-to-day lives. Taking ukemi, throw after throw, wristlock after wristlock, year after year builds up certain attitudes.

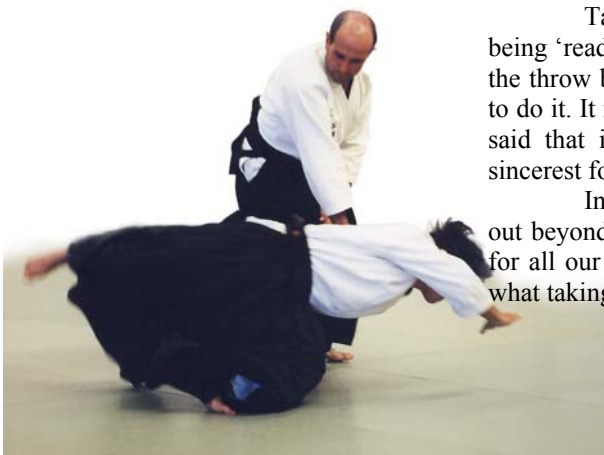
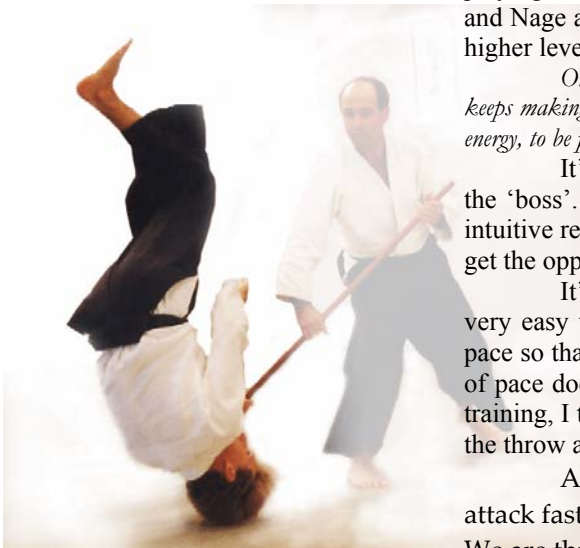
Should it not make us more humble? After all, in most lessons we are going to end up on our backsides one way or another.

Taking ukemi should also make us more aware and considerate.

This awareness, before anything has even happened, of the other person's needs is the heart of taking ukemi. Being considerate should be pre-emptive, not just reactive.

Taking ukemi doesn't mean just reacting to what Nage does. It doesn't mean being 'ready' in some fear-driven, defensive way. It means being helpful to Nage before the throw begins. It means being available to lift and carry mats before anyone asks us to do it. It means cutting our fingernails before they cut someone else. My mother often said that imitation was the sincerest form of flattery. I think being helpful is the sincerest form of gratitude.

In the end, the Uke role and the Nage role blend into one. Our spirit reaches out beyond what the other person is about to do. If our main purpose, out of *gratitude* for all our partners and for Aikido itself, is to be *helpful* then I think we have gained what taking ukemi is really designed to teach us.



It's all about Trust.
By John Litchen

UKEMI

Taking ukemi is more than simply receiving a throw (nage waza) or a pin (katame waza). It is of course a way of preventing oneself from being injured, so one can continue practicing. *But it is primarily about trust.*

It is also about attacking with sufficient focus, intention, and intensity, so that to avoid the perceived threat Nage must move.

Whether Nage only moves aside allowing the attack to pass, or whether Nage harmonises with Uke's attack in order to redirect it and to destabilize it depends upon the agreed practice.

This is where trust comes into it. Both Nage and Uke know they are not trying to hurt each other. Both must have sufficient control to pull back if they see their partner is not responding quickly enough. Practice may have to be slowed down.

It is not Uke's intention to deliberately harm Nage. Nor is it Nage's intention to do serious damage to Uke in execution of a technique. Each is lending the other his or her body to practice and study a given technique. Holding back wont work —for a true aikido waza to be created a proper attack is needed. Each partner needs to be aware of the movement and energy of the other. Uke should be relaxed without having a preconceived idea of the end result, but sensitive enough to follow in the direction Nage leads.

(This is difficult because the teacher demonstrates the exercise and all the students know what to expect. Often they take the lazy way out and simply walk through it. Trying to imagine approaching the exercise as if for the very first time without any concept of the end result — a beginners mind — should add some measure of reality to the training.)

If a throw is called for, then Nage must blend and redirect Uke's energy to the point of unbalance where Uke has no option but to fall or be thrown. At this point Uke needs to be in control of how the fall is taken. Whether the impact on the mat is lessened by rolling or is halted by abruptly breaking the fall, or by hanging on to Nage and using Nage's movement to lessen the impact depends on Uke's perception and feeling of Nage's energy, as well as experience and natural reaction to being thrown.

It depends on the moment, and each time the exercise is repeated it is different in many subtle ways. The attacking speed changes, the angle of attack is not the same as before, Nage's response is faster or slower, the entry is slightly altered, and many variable combinations come together to create a subtly different version of the same thing. If one changes partners for the same technique then all the parameters are again changed.

But what doesn't change is that each partner must trust the other to take care of him or her.

This is what Ukemi is about.



Mind, Body & Spirit: A personal experience.

By Dr. Norman Shum.

Enforced physical inactivity that modifies one's usual routine is often an opportunity for reflection, contemplation and other meditative exercises — pursuits for me that have been too long neglected. After several weekends out of town as part of my work attending two update workshops in SA and a conference in Launceston in September, the October long weekend was my first chance to get back to some physical activities.

On the Saturday I trained in aikido. On Sunday I played tennis. I had just begun the second set of another game on the holiday Monday when 'thump' — It felt as if I had been hit across the lower left leg from behind with a cricket bat! Stunned momentarily I soon realized my Achilles tendon had ruptured.

An emergency visit to a sports-clinic doctor confirmed the diagnosis. An appointment with the orthopaedic surgeon was arranged for the next day. Thus, one day after the injury I was wearing a below knee cast and using crutches. Surgery was ruled out: expected recovery time, vague. Being medically qualified, I knew that a tendon takes much longer to heal than torn muscles or broken bones. I was not happy, as while I could still continue my professional work, I would *not* be able to train in aikido or play tennis for an indefinite period.

I decided to use some of the clinical skills I teach my patients but my 'self therapy' took me on an interesting and unexpected journey. I accepted that persistent, sustained vigorous movement in any physical discipline, no matter how conditioned, healthy and fit the performer is, there is always the risk of damage and injury. One only has to observe what can happen to professional dancers, and elite athletes.

I wondered how martial arts practitioners coped with inevitable injuries. To find out I began by re-reading two books I had first read many years ago: 'Zen in the Martial Arts' by Joe Hyams, and 'Zen for Beginners' by Judith Blackstone & Zoran Josipovic. Others soon followed. (listed below.)

In Hyams' book he described his karate friend, Sam Brodsky injuring his hand demonstrating a breaking technique. Instead of smashing all nine of the one-inch thick slabs of concrete stacked in a pile. Seven broke and so did some bones in Brodsky's hand! Hyams found Brodsky surprised at his injury but not evidencing obvious pain. Later Hyams learned that his friend was more disturbed by his doctor's poor prognosis regarding the healing time and recovery after the necessary surgery. Brodsky was told it might take 3 to 6 months to heal, then another 6 months to regain some movement.

Brodsky had studied martial arts in Korea and Japan and believed healing began in the mind, so each night he started applying the mental techniques he had learned to control his pain and enhance his healing. As I re-read the book it became obvious Brodsky was using visualization and autosuggestion, much the same as are used in hypnosis, one of the modalities I regularly use in my clinical work. I began using similar visualizations but with a more medical touch. Instead of Brodsky's imagined team of construction workers with building equipment I envisaged increased blood circulation with healing cells carrying oxygen and collagen fibres to the damaged tendon. I could feel the collagen literally snaking its way in and out of the tendon knitting it all back together.

Other inspirational comments from the books helped me use the time to ponder while the healing took place. Some of these I reproduce here but do not attempt to explain. In Zen, if you let your mind play with the words, you will find your own meaning. Zen cannot truly be described with words. It is a personal experience. *Think that which cannot be thought!*

Certainly from reading my other books on aikido, Zen practices and beliefs contribute to aikido and aikido contributes to the experience of Zen. One only has to read the introduction written by Kisshomaru Ueshiba to O'Sensei's "Budo: Teachings of the Founder of Aikido," or "Ki in Daily Life" by one of O'Sensei's senior students, Koichi Tohei to see the truth of this.

For your contemplation then:

"Tell me, I'll forget. Show me, I may remember. But involve me and I'll understand." Chinese proverb. — I believe this is the essence of good training as well as effective therapy in my work.

"A man with outward courage dares to die. A man with inward courage dares to live." Lao Tzu. — This also helped me believe my ankle would heal.

"We are what we think. All that we are arises with our thoughts. With our thoughts we make our world." Buddha. — A good principle to start unifying mind, body and spirit.

Being here now:

"If Zen is telling us anything, it is to be here now, to live in this moment. Simple enough. So what stops us? To live in the moment, we must go out of our minds. The mind, with its guilt and resentment about the past and its fears and hopes for the future, the mind that confuses thoughts about people, things, and events with the people, things, and events themselves—must be transcended. Out of the mind and into direct immediate experience—this is the message of Zen."

For four months now, I have not been able to physically be on the mat and I do not know when I will be able. But I went to the dojo as often as I could on my crutches and "watched with a beginner's mind" as my friends and fellow aikidoka trained. This was an interesting experience, training more with my mind and spirit than my body.

Reality:

"Things are not what they seem, including us. As a Zen master put it, 'how can you be happy when you spend most of your time worrying about something that doesn't even exist?' The 'something' he was referring to is the ego — that confused jumble of thoughts and desires we mistake for the Self. Reality and the true perception of it lie beyond this narrow band of socially conditioned consciousness. From the perspective of Zen, to 'get real' is to get out of ourselves, to release the identification with ourselves as a 'thing apart.' A part is in conflict with other parts; but the whole cannot be against itself."

"In reality there is no better, no worse, no difference. There is no loss or gain, nothing old or new. There is nothing to compare with anything else.

Everything in the universe is the one same stuff, taking on various forms or disguises. The Zen realization of 'emptiness' comes from the release of the identification with, and attachment to, forms, including the physical form we call the body and the mental form we call the ego and mistake for the Self."

I could relate this to my aikido experience in that I have found that ego does not seem to come into the training. In my dojo, everyone trains with everyone else, beginner right through to Sensei David Scott. There are many smiles on the faces of the participants in the class. No one is out to prove anything. Did my injury raise any ego concerns? Well, I was unable to take my next opportunity for grading last November. Was my ego disappointed? Probably a little.

Responsibility:

"One of the great lessons of Zen is to take total responsibility for your own life. Unfortunately, many of us have been conditioned to believe, feel, and act as though the world owes us something. Zen says, why waste time and energy with regrets and whining? We have the gift of life and the opportunities of this moment."

So what has happened to my Achilles tendon? The plaster came off one week before Xmas. It is healed but the calf muscle above it is very weak. My surgeon instructed me, no running, jumping, lunging and definitely *no tennis or aikido training*, yet! For the time being it is muscle and tendon strengthening only. As I write the end of this story, it is now over four months since I tore the tendon. I do not know if I have assisted my own healing or not by my thinking and experiencing efforts, but as various sages have said, I cannot have done myself any harm.

In closing, please consider these two quotes. One from my ancestral namesake, Mencius, (Chinese philosopher Men Tse, nephew of Confucious.) "*He who has*

exhausted all his mental constitution knows his nature. Knowing his nature, he knows heaven.

And this from O'Sensei.

"Mankind's role is to fulfill his heaven-sent purpose through a sincere heart that is in harmony with all creation and loves all things.

Dr Norman Shum
BSc [Cant], MB ChB [Otago],
FRANZCP, Dip Clin Hypn, MASH.
Aikidoka..

Dr Norman Shum is qualified and trained as a psychologist and consultant physician specialising in psychological medicine/psychiatry. When not working, that is, in 'ordinary' person mode, he is a student of aikido, an aikidoka.

The books which helped Dr Shum to heal himself are: Zen in the Martial Arts by Joe Hyams, Zen for Beginners by Judith Blackstone and Zoran Josipovic, Zen Soup by Laurence Boldt, Zen Flesh, Zen Bones by Paul Reys, On Having No Head by D E Harding, and The Way of Zen by Allan Watts.



Finally a quote from Laurence G. Boldt's "Zen Soup," section on Beginner's Mind, "*As only an empty cup can be filled, so only a heart emptied of the pride of what it thinks it knows, can be open to new experience and receive the gifts of wisdom. When we embrace the humility to meet life head-on, without the baggage of what we think we know, we make room for ourselves to grow.*"

Postscript: The physiotherapist and orthopaedic surgeon believe I have recovered far better than they expected given my supposed poor circulation problem. I have to continue the strengthening exercises and perhaps at my next appointment the specialist will say I can begin training again - gently!

Special project.

Aiki-Kai Australia is planning something special for its 40th Birthday...

A special book celebrating 40 years of Aikido with Sugano Shihan in Australia.

We need photographs of historical value to publish so if anyone can help, please contact the editor of this newsletter (address on back page) or Tony Smibert Sensei for further information.

There will be more about this in the bulletin sent to all the dojos shortly.

The following story and photo appeared in the Warwick **Daily News** newspaper on Monday February 10th 2003, and is reprinted here with their kind permission.

Grace fights back.

Aikido Helps Grace to get more from life.

WARWICK woman Grace Ompoc, 21, has had one of her biggest victories in her life by obtaining her first grading in Aikido.

Miss Ompoc was born with cerebral palsy, which resulted in her having a speech problem, poor motor skills and reduced physical ability.

Supported Employment coordinator Desley Young approached Miss Ompoc about trying an "Options Plus" program, which may help her transition into community activities.

The program was designed to help her using an exercise program with the Warwick Aikido Club.

Aikido club trainer Kathy McCarthy said since Grace started with the club last April there had been a huge improvement in her speech, motor skills, physical co-ordination and her willingness to attempt new exercises.

Miss McCarthy said club members were ecstatic that Grace had battled disabilities and received her first grading yesterday. Graham Morris, 5th Dan Aikido Sensei conducted her grading test during a full weekend of Aikido activities with visitors from the Gold Coast, Brisbane and Warwick.

Shortly after that story appeared Kathy received this letter from Desley Young, Manager of the Warwick Supported Employment Group.

Dear Kath and Ross,
THANK YOU. I would like to thank you both and your AIKIDO club. I witnessed on Sunday so fantastic I could burst. No need to explain to you both because I know you were both bursting with pride as well.

However, it's not every organisation that can take a person with a disability in, I have received quite a few setbacks from some organisations who resent the inclusion of that person with a disability in their group. You have achieved something that many support workers would be envious of.

That inclusion of Grace is quite exceptional. I know Grace and her family thank you both in their very special way but please know as a representative of people with disabilities, my committee and myself thank you for your time, patience and intuition in training this beautiful young lady.

Would you please pass on our appreciation to the other members of your AIKIDO club as well.

Regards,
Desley young.

First Grading: With obvious enthusiasm, Grace throws Sensei Morris ↓



Winter School this July will be held at a beautiful new venue North of Sydney on the beach at Collaroy.

Please check the NSW or Aiki-Kai website for details or contact Andrew Dziedzic.

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