

**Aiki do doesn't have competitive matches.**

**Always keep the feeling of being on the battlefield.**

**Aoyagi Eisuke:**

Aikido doesn't have competitive matches, so what is the objective of training?  
How can we decide our training goals?

**Inaba Sensei:**

It was one of Master Ueshiba's discerning suggestions that Aikido should not have competitive matches. One explanation is that he didn't want to make a champion or "number one" person, and in addition he thought it more important that individuals reach their own highest level.

But if we think about it deeply, this is probably not the only or main reason. The question is what kind of competitive matches you can have if you want to practice a Bujutsu (武術: martial arts) which is really useful in life's battles.

A long time ago in Japan, if you lost a match, this was shameful. So you wanted to avoid half-hearted matches, and wanted to die like a brave man in a fight rather than getting injured. It was either win or die. That leads to considering what kind of competitive matches are possible if you fight with a real sword. This would be the equivalent of having competitive matches with guns nowadays. I wonder how effective "sporting" martial arts matches under specific rules would be in a real battle? In a sporting championship match you fight within a specified time of period, in a predetermined place, under fixed rules. Even if you win the match, how much influence or impact will that have on the battles you encounter in your life?

It's difficult to say whether or not it's better to have competitive matches. You could say that they are fun, if viewed as a sporting activity.

Personally I lean toward not having competitive matches in Aikido. If you have a match on such and such a day, at a certain time and place, you prepare for that. But in real life, you don't know when you might have to fight for your life. If you prepare only for matches, you sometimes forget that life is unpredictable. You cannot predict if a casual meeting might become an unexpected fight that dominates your whole life. In your life a completely unexpected moment could decide your fate. If you set up competitive matches, then sometimes you lose that awareness. Even if you do not have a competitive match approaching, you should always maintain the constant feeling that you have a match and you keep the alertness of a battlefield at all times. That kind of feeling is much more important to keep than having competitive matches. It will help you to lead an attentive life without carelessness. That is more essential for Budo. Always keep the feeling of being on the battlefield, so you can cope with a sudden attack. You will get your priorities wrong, if you set up competitive matches in your training, and thus lose the awareness appropriate to a battlefield.

That said, in certain situations I feel that competitive matches can be useful, depending on the purpose. If you want to experience competitive matches, you can try other martial arts such as Kendo, Judo, Karate, Kyudo, and other sports. You don't need to set up competitive matches in Aikido training.

But there is a big drawback to competitive matches. In modern Kendo they wear armor and do well with it, but without armor sometimes they feel incapable of moving. If they had Bokuto (wooden swords) or Shinken (real swords) instead of Shinai made of bamboo, they might freeze up even more.

A drawback of the lack of competitive matches in Aikido is that you might lose the tension associated with matches, and the practice can get monotonous and too comfortable. Seek to regain this tension in your Aikido training if you lose it, and pursue the positive aspects of Aikido training.

You cannot say that it is best not to have competitive matches. There are some Budo which attract people partly because of competitive matches. It is good to research genuine techniques of Aikido through training with a sense of tension, compensating for the handicap of not having competitive matches as in Karate and Kendo.

People who insist on not having competitive matches in Aikido are those for whom Aikido is everything. The Japanese samurai knew that only one type of martial art was not enough for the battlefield. You should know a minimum of three or four to feel assured. In true martial arts, there is no such thing as enough.

A battle doesn't have rules. If you don't have a sword, you have to fight without one. Maybe someone will shoot at you from far away. You can't say: "I only studied Aikido - so please fight by Aikido rules."

## From Jutsu (術 : Technique) to Do (道 : Way)

### Aoyagi Eisuke:

You said that there is no fixed form in a real battle, so you can't be particular about just one type of martial art?

### Inaba Sensei:

Martial arts techniques are tools for fighting. You should know that a real attack is not constrained. Let's think about a real battle. In a battle the goal is to defeat the opponent's power. Even if you destroy the combat power of the opponent, they will make preparations to attack you once more as long as they still have the will to fight. Therefore, you have to conquer their will to fight. If you don't completely conquer their will after destroying their combat power, the opponent will strike back at you once more.

Don't you practice Aikido in that way? In Aikido practice you use techniques (including throwing, grappling and pinning) until your opponent gives up, thus you conquer their will to fight.

When the opponent loses the will to fight, that's the end of the battle. But in a real battle sometimes people do not lose their will to fight to the death. Such people are called Yusha (勇者: brave person; person of courage). That's why a real battle may end up as kill-or-be-killed. If you kill someone unnecessarily, it is a bad thing. If the opponent loses their will to fight and gives up, you trust the words of the opponent and stop the battle. This was the custom for battles between warriors in Japan.

In the history of battles in foreign countries it was not so easy. Sometimes people falsely claimed to give up but actually fought back and beat their opponent. That's why combatants sometimes felt that they had no choice but to destroy each other unlike the custom of battles in Japan. I think the battles in Japan were originally similar to those in foreign countries. However, after many years of battles among warriors, the "Way" (道: Do) of "Warriors" (武士: Bushi) or "Bushido" (武士道: the way of warriors) has eventually evolved in Japan by natural growth.

The lineage of Bushi (samurai or warriors) such as the Taira clan (also referred to as Hei-shi or Hei-ke or Kanmu-Hei-shi) and the Minamoto clan (also referred to as Gen-ji or Seiwa-Gen-ji) traces back to the imperial house of Japan. Both Hei-shi and Gen-ji were major Japanese clans of Bushi. The Kanmu-Hei-shi (桓武平氏) descended from Kanmu Tenno (桓武天皇: 737-806, the 50th Tenno of Japan) and the Seiwa-Gen-ji (清和源氏) descended from Seiwa Tenno (清和天皇: 850-881, the 56th Tenno of Japan). As such, they came from the same imperial house family roots, and had also been military officers of the Tenno (天皇). However, sometimes they were obliged to fight each other on the battlefield due to political differences between their parties. They knew that they were the same and therefore they sympathized with the difficult positions of their adversaries, and respected each other for their loyalty and brave fighting spirit. This peculiar situation brought about a change in the way battles were fought in Japan as well as the way opponents on the battlefield were killed, in that they did not want to stain the honour of their opponent as a Bushi if he fought loyally and bravely. This is the historical root of Bushido (the Way of Bushi) which still underlies the basis of the word Budo (the Way of Bu) in Japan today.

## **Jutsu (術: Technique) and Do (道: Way) ---- How to fight;**

**How to treat an opponent who loses; How to handle yourself when you lose.**

You should know the difference between Jutsu (technique) and Do (way). Do is a way of life. Jutsu is martial technique; how to fight, how to use a sword, how to shoot with bow and arrow etc. You cannot be serious only about technique without also considering the way of life because the technique is a means to follow the way. If you can find a way to follow, then you can muster the power to train the technique, and you can develop a strong mind to research the technique.

Once you get a clear picture of the principle of a Bujutsu (martial art), you will be able to deepen your understanding of facets of human society. You will then be able to have clear values, and will be able to deepen your understanding of Do (way) and Jutsu (technique) which are closely inter-related. If you discuss Budo without clarifying this fundamental underpinning of Budo, you won't be able to understand what Budo is. Japanese Budo is now popular in foreign countries. But if you translate the word Budo as "martial arts", it puts the focus on martial technique (Jutsu), which is less than half of the true meaning of Budo.

**Aoyagi Eisuke:**

That's a shame, isn't it?

**Inaba Sensei:**

Yes, it is. If Budo spreads in foreign countries in the name of martial arts, it cannot be helped that people will only understand part of the true meaning of Budo.

You should remind yourself first that a fundamental premise of Budo is the recognition that all living things are bound to die. Then you have to think about how you can make your life meaningful.

Very few people live to be 100 years old. Even if you live to such an age, your health will decline at around seventy due to natural causes. You need about twenty years for education when young. In addition, you may need a further training course or to work on an internship for five or ten years. So you will have only 20 or 30 years to really do anything in your life, and one-third of that time you are sleeping! Also you have to think about eating, etc. So how much time do you really have to make your life meaningful? Time is limited! If you don't think about this seriously, you will waste your time.

If you want to learn Aikido, think first "My time is limited and thus it is very important." Then consider: "What is Aikido?" If you feel that it's meaningless to practice Aikido, you should quit and look for something else that is really important to you. Considering these things deeply, and committing to them with your whole spirit, is vital.

Therefore, if you want to learn Aikido, you should research "What is the essence of Aikido?" Then look for the appropriate teacher and learn from them. Once you become convinced, practice the most important aspects thoroughly. If your approach is casual, as if you are going out for a jog, you are just wasting time.

**Aoyagi Eisuke:**

How did you get an opportunity to encounter a good path for Budo training?

**Inaba Sensei:**

I guess my encounter with the Ken (剣: sword) of Kuniichi Michiyuki Sensei (1894-1966), who was a Master of Kashima Shinryu, brought me to the quest for Budo. At first, even though I had joined his Dojo, I could not get any direct teaching from him. One rainy day, nobody was there

except him and me. He said, "Take a sword," and gave me a very detailed lesson. When I struck at my teacher with Kesagiri, I felt that this was the moment I had been waiting for, and I felt a surge of righteous spirit from deep within my body. I think the Ken has something that reminds us of the Japanese spirit in a way beyond reason or logic.

Before I joined Kuni i Sensei ' s dojo, I had started training at the Aiki kai Hombu Dojo. Different teachers taught us every day, and we did not have lessons just from one particular teacher. But once in a while the founder of Aikido, Master Ueshiba Morihei, turned up in the dojo and talked to us on various topics and this inspired me.

A senior student of Master Ueshiba, Yamaguchi Seigo Sensei (1924-1996), had very flexible body movement. He was very popular because of his smooth, elegant movement. I joined him as a private student, and I learned a lot from him such as how to use the body, as well as his way of thinking. Thus my vision for Bujutsu became clearer and my body grew stronger gradually. Coincidentally, that was the time I was able to join Kuni i Sensei ' s Dojo. I think most probably my feeling had been tuned, and it was therefore ideal timing for me to be inspired about Budo.

**Aoyagi Eisuke:**

When did you start the practice at the Aikikai Hombu Dojo?

**Inaba Sensei:**

At the end of 1962, in December of my third year of high school. I did swimming until junior high school, but I didn' t do anything after I entered high school. I felt that my body was in poor shape and that I should get back into good shape once more. I had a friend who lived near the Aikikai Hombu Dojo in Shinjuku. He said let's go together. I went there just out of curiosity. I practiced there two or three times a week but was not particularly motivated.

I then met Mr. Shimada Kazushi ge (1927-1985) there. He was a teacher at the Gakushuin Boys' Junior High School and a person with a broad perspective and deep insight into Budo. Through the personal connection with Mr. Shimada, I became recognized and favored by some of his acquaintances and they gave me the opportunity to receive their guidance. I also received thoughtful guidance and advice about Aikido training from Mr. Shimada. He knew the true essence of martial arts, and he said that if I wanted to learn Aikido, Yamaguchi Sensei was a good teacher, and he personally introduced me to Yamaguchi Sensei ' s private Dojo. He also said that for Kenjutsu, I should learn from Kuni i Sensei since he was an outstanding master. He took me, together with Tanaka Shigeo Sensei (born 1928: who subsequently became the first director and is currently honorary director of the Shiseikan), to Kuni i Sensei ' s Dojo.

**Aoyagi Eisuke:**

After you graduated from Meiji University, what kind of job did you do?

**Inaba Sensei:**

My father owned a small company that made sharpeners for metal and wood. I was expected to take over from him: that's why I studied mechanical engineering. But the study of mechanical

engineering was dull for me, and I wasn't interested and could not concentrate on my studies. I had already studied Aikido and met Kuni i Sensei . His personality made a strong impression on me and I was obsessed with the practice of Kashima Shinryu Kenjutsu.

Mr. Shimada, Tanaka Sensei and I visited Kuni i Sensei with a letter of introduction from Ashizu Sensei (1909-1992; Shinto thinker). Kuni i Sensei respected Ashizu Sensei deeply as a spiritual teacher and thinker, even though Ashizu Sensei was younger than Kuni i Sensei . So Kuni i Sensei accepted us as companions who shared his spiritual aims, and he taught us in a special way. But a year-and-a-half after we started learning, Kuni i Sensei died.

Since Kuni i Sensei 's health had already been bad before we met him, after two previous heart attacks, we always had a feeling of tension in our mind whenever we went to the Dojo in Taki nogawa – each day could be the last day of our training with him. I ignored my studies at the university, and focused only on the practice with Kuni i Sensei . But sometimes I could not go to Kuni i Sensei 's Dojo for one week due to exams or a training camp of the university Aikido club. Then Kuni i Sensei sent me a letter asking why I had not turned up to the Dojo. I could not help but be concerned about Kuni i Sensei getting weaker and weaker, and I had pain in my heart when I took time off from the practice. So I went to the Dojo almost every day.

Under such circumstances I ended up making a decision to take the path of Budo rather than that of taking over my family' s business. Although I tentatively joined my father's company, I was not able to devote myself seriously to my work. I wasn't good at management or business.

I consulted Ashizu Sensei and Mr. Shimada about my future, and that I wanted to pursue the path of Budo. They said, " If you chose this, then you should understand what real fighting is in modern society. But if you try to study this in a military unit in a foreign country, you could be injured or killed, and then you would get your priorities wrong." So I immediately joined the riot police of the Metropolitan Police Department to learn to some extent what real fighting (without firearms) was about. As an officer of the riot police in the year 1970, I took part in the violent events connected to the movement against ratifying the new Japan-American security treaty. I thought that maybe that was enough, and that I should study Japanese spirit next. If so, I would have to study Shinto. I resigned from the Police and I became a journalist of the weekly newspaper company called "Jinja Shinpo". It was small, but it was an opinion leader of the national spirit of Japan. I worked as the driver and assistant to Ashizu Sensei as well as being a journalist for Jinja Shinpo, and I studied Shinto under the guidance of Ashizu Sensei .

**Aoyagi Eisuke:**

As soon as the Meiji Jingu established the Shiseikan Budojo, did you start to teach there?

**Inaba Sensei :**

Yes, starting in October 1973.

## Technique (術: Jutsu) for the Way (道)

### Aoyagi Eisuke:

People use the words Budo (武道) and Bujutsu (武術) interchangeably.  
How can we distinguish them?

### Inaba Sensei:

If you see this picture, you can see an origin of the spiritual aspect of the word " Bu" (武) which has been shared among Japanese people. A famous Japanese artist Domoto Insho (堂本印象 : 1891-1975) donated the picture to the Kashiwara Jingu in 1940 before the Great East Asian War (1941-1952). It' s a portrait of an ancient warrior, which most probably depicts Jinmu Tenno (神武天皇) who was the first Tenno of Japan. The young warrior holds a Himorogi (神籬: a divine tree) in his right hand and has a bow in his left hand, and he wears a sword at his waist.

The picture shows the story of Jinmu Tenno planting a Himorogi in a place in Yamato Province (modern Kashiwara in Nara Prefecture) while praying for the prosperity of the country so as to ensure its people to live in happiness and have enough to eat.



It' s not much different from the idea of planting trees to create a forest. If you want to make a wood or a forest you need to start by planting a single tree. The first person or the leader plants a tree, and then like-minded people bring other plants and offer their help for planting. As time passes the plants grow to form a thick forest. One day people may build a shrine building in the forest wishing that Kami (神: deities) may reside there, and this will become a Jinja (神社: Shinto shrine, meaning "place of the deities" ) surrounded by sacred woods. This is Shinto' s idea of Iwasaka (磐境: a sacred enclosure with a rock at the centre) Himorogi surrounded by sanctuary woods. You have to have a goal and walk along the path toward the goal even if you can only accomplish a little at a time. This is very important.

This picture means, " I will fight in order to reach my goal , overcoming any obstacles. Even if I dislike fighting, I will fight for justice. I have the mind-set that I am ready to "lay down my life" at any time. "

But the technique of archery per se does not imply such a spiritual aspect of " Bu" or Budo. You have to find your own way or goal . You cannot confuse Bujutsu (武術: technique) with Budo (武道: way). If you mix them up, your efforts to seek Bujutsu (武術) and Budo (武道) will be indistinct and unsuccessful .

Aoyagi Eisuke:

The goal and technique together make Budo, right?

Inaba Sensei:

Right. "Do" (way) has a goal to be achieved. You need techniques as the means to achieve that goal. And it is necessary to change the techniques according to the times. A long time ago the bow was an excellent tool and technique for fighting, but now maybe it's not the bow. That's why the appropriate technique has changed one after another to Kendo, Judo, Aikido etc. If you say it must be Aikido, and Aikido is best, your thought will stop there. If you mix up "Do" (way) and "Jutsu" (technique) then things become strange.

Aikido Journal: At the Shiseikan you teach Aikido and Kashima Shinryu? Do people who learn Aikido also take Kashima Shinryu?

Inaba Sensei: Yes. I teach both Aikido and Kashima Shinryu. There are people who want to learn only Kashima Shinryu or only Aikido. Usually people who want to practice Aikido are also interested in the sword work. They want to take lessons in the sword work. But there are people who want to learn only Kashima Shinryu. These people come to the Shiseikan seeking Kuni-style Kashima Shinryu martial arts which are useful for actual combat. So quite a few people say they do not want to practice Aikido.

Even so, I usually tell them that it's better to try to develop their body through the practice of Aikido techniques because they can learn Kashima Shinryu sword work only after they make their body more flexible and soft.

Among those who want to learn Kashima Shinryu at the Shiseikan, there are many Bujutsu enthusiasts who have read a lot of martial arts magazines. That's why they say they only want to practice Kenjutsu at the Shiseikan. But where do the sword techniques come from? It's from the mind and body. The important thing is how you can develop your mind and body. I don't think you can develop holistic martial arts training if you don't practice Taijutsu such as Aikido and Jujutsu while you practice the sword work of Kashima Shinryu.

## **Calm Mind and "Reading the Situation"**

Aoyagi Eisuke:

How do you separate or unify the technique of Kashima Shinryu and Aikido in your teachings?

Inaba Sensei:

I teach my students the basic forms of Kashima Shinryu and Aikido respectively. But I always keep in mind not to teach anything that may go against the principle of Bujutsu (martial arts) that attaches importance to complete freedom of movement without being trapped by the form. While teaching the technique to my students, I feel that it is very important for them to learn how to calm their mind (Ki energy) even if it were an experience of short time of period.



No matter how you are going to fight, in any situation you need to understand where you are at that moment, and precisely what situation you are in. If you misunderstand this, no matter how you use your technique, your moves will not work effectively on your opponent.

Having said that, how can you "read the situation?" Above all, you have to be able to calm your mind so that you can size up the situation, sense how the opponent will attack, and decide how you should react to the opponent.

At the same time, you have to practice a variety of techniques regularly and consistently. Otherwise you won't be able to use the techniques successfully even if you can judge the situation properly, and even if you know which technique will work effectively. Therefore, you have to drum into your body in daily practice that you must calm your mind, you must read the situation, and you must use such technique in such situation. Both mind practice and body practice are important.

While practicing, you have to set up imaginary situations and practice applicable technique for the respective situation. Calm your mind (Ki energy), keep your centre of gravity at low position so that it does not float up, and maintain flexibility in your body so as to be able to make your concentrated power be effective.

It doesn't matter which Ryuha (流派) you practice; all you need for Bujutsu (martial arts) is to read the situation, respond flexibly to your opponent, and focus your power in the most necessary point of the body when needed.

Another way to say Ken (剣: sword) in Japanese is Tachi (太刀). The word "tachi" originates from a verb "tatsu" (cut off) which also means "decide". This means that you should collect the necessary information, respond to the information flexibly, catch the direction correctly, make a "decision" and focus your power into the necessary point. To achieve this, you have to focus on one thing and cut off all the rest. If you cannot calm your mind you will not be able to catch the timing and distance between you and your opponent.

## **Judging "Timing" (時) and "Distance" (間) and "Focusing" (集中) your Power (力)**

Many people think they cannot use "Aiki" technique because they do not have as much strength as their opponent. They misunderstand and think that they cannot do it because they do not have enough physical power, and so they start unnecessary weight training. They should know that the reason they cannot use "Aiki" technique is because they cannot judge "timing" and "distance" properly. It's not because of the lack of physical power, but it's because their judgment or reading of the situation is bad.

So, what is the right timing and what is the appropriate distance? You cannot measure these with a clock or ruler. Timing and distance have to be judged by each person's intuition. If you get nervous or worried or suspicious about something, this will cloud your intuition.

To avoid such a consequence you have to exert your mind and keep a sense of tautness when you face your opponents. This state of mind can be achieved by the purification of mind, which is called "Harai" (祓い: purification) in Shinto. You have to make your mind clear, like a mirror. I would say that you can catch the appropriate timing only when your mind becomes clear and bright through the purification (Harai) of your mind and body.

However, even if you can catch the right timing, you cannot do anything if you cannot focus your power. You have to concentrate your power in the "Kafuku-tanden" (下腹丹田: centre of lower abdomen) inside your body. The power stored in the Kafuku-tanden can be defined as "defensive power", and the power which flows out from the Kafuku-tanden can be defined as "offensive power".

Now, how can you produce "offensive power"? First of all, you have to concentrate and focus your power in the centre of your body – that is the Kafuku-tanden. Once the Kafuku-tanden is filled to overflowing, "offensive power" will be generated naturally from it. This power is often referred to as "Iryoku" (威力) and "Bui" (武威) which describes the condition of the power (Ki energy) concentrated in your centre becoming that centre power (中心力) which conveys authority and dignity. It is most important to express true "Iryoku" in Budo, while empty threat and bravado are useless.

You can perceive Ki energy sufficiently concentrated in the Kafuku-tanden as the centre power which is the source of "Iryoku" (威力). If you don't have centre power, it will be a bluff. Above all, you have to train how to concentrate your power in the Kafuku-tanden, so that you can cultivate Ki energy which naturally flows out from it. If you understand this principle, you will understand how to develop your body and mind and how you should train "Ai ki" technique.

If you merely attempt to defeat your opponent, forgetting the essential principle of centre power, you cannot put forth your strength, and then you will risk self-destructing because you have not sufficient power to keep your centre of gravity.

As mentioned in HIDA-SHIKI KYOKEN-JUTSU (HIDA refers to "HIDA Harumichi" (1883-1956), SHIKI means "style", KYO means "strong", KEN means "health", JUTSU means "technique"), make your body straight by stretching the spinal column and straightening the neck, and make your shoulders relaxed, and drop your centre of gravity to the centre point of the Kafuku-tanden. Then, you can build a centre point in your body, in which you can produce centre power. If your centre is not filled by the centre power, you can never transmit Ki energy through your fingers.

Try to remove unnecessary strength from the upper body and train the lower body as in Sumo training so as to be able to strengthen the power of the Kafuku-tanden. Then, you will be able to develop your centre power gradually, which can be transmitted to any points of your body, whenever it is needed.

Even if you can concentrate the power in the Kafuku-tanden, you may not be able to easily transmit

it to the point where you need it. If you don't devise a way how to transmit the power within the body you cannot achieve this. You have to devise both ways; firstly how to concentrate the power in the Kafuku-tanden, and then how to transmit the power from that point to any required points such as where you receive an attack from your opponent. Also, if you have a weapon, you have to be able to transmit Ki energy through the weapon. If you understand this principle, you will know how to train your mind and body, and what you need to develop through the practice. At the exact moment of clash with your opponent, you have to concentrate and focus your power (Ki energy) in the Kafuku-tanden and transmit it to the point where you need it, and as a consequence you can break down the attack power of your opponent. I recognize that is "Aiki" power.

Consequently, I think it's really important to "develop the fundamentals of mind and body". That is true not only for Aikido. In Karate when you strike, you firmly step in with your foot. It's the same with Kendo and Sumo. I recommend you to do the exercise of SHIKO stepping which is the most fundamental exercise of Sumo. In Sumo training there remain basic training methods which are useful for developing the fundamentals of mind and body for Bujutsu (martial arts) practice.

< TBC >

#### **Aikido ---- Both Training technique and the Pursuit of Do**

Aikido Journal: Everyone at the Shiseikan does Sumo training often.

Inaba Sensei: I think it's good to devise ways to practice Sumo in order to develop the lower abdomen.

In Sumo, you train the legs and hips. You attack and bring the elbows down to the sides of the body, and move the lower abdominal power to both hands and fingers. In Kendo you take large steps and the power moves from your lower abdomen to the top of sword. If you do this type of training, you will be able to focus your power; your ki will be full and your body will develop. If your mind and spirit grow and your body develops, your ki will be full. If so, you will not have to worry about being captured by the enemy. You will feel that you have no rivals.

If you do not have enough of this type of ki, you will panic. You will wonder what to do and you will become stiff.

With any type of training you should think about developing power in the lower abdomen. In Aikido, uke can train the lower abdomen better. When you throw forcefully you use extra power and lose energy from the lower abdomen. Kendo people are afraid of falling. That's why they protect themselves from falling, and they get a little stiff. Karate people are afraid of the counterattack. Each martial art has strengths and weaknesses, but "Aiki" is not afraid of the counterattack. If Aiki people practice ken they are not afraid of falling.

In this way, it's better to think that Aiki has two meanings: one is to train in Aiki technique, while the second is to simultaneously seek Do (The Way) as a Japanese practitioner would do. These two ideas are separate but if, in a fight, your life is on the line, when you use the technique you will show your lifestyle, the way you live, and your spirit. You can see that you cannot separate the two points. But on the other hand, you have to practice technique separately, and Do has to be thought about separately. If not, you cannot go deeper. We have to think about these two separately, but at the same time, they are intertwined.

### **"What is Aiki Technique?" ---- Making the Opponent's Power Zero**

When power meets power on the battlefield and you think about what Aiki technique is, how can we overcome the opponent's power and make it zero? I think this is the point of Aiki technique. Make the opponent's attack zero; take away the opponent's way to attack again, and overcome the opponent's fighting spirit. These points are important when you think about Jujutsu. Daito-ryu uses the term AikiJujutsu. AikiJujutsu is the correct expression. Initially, Aiki neutralizes the opponent's attack; then Jujutsu is used to remove the means to attack thus also defeating the opponent's fighting spirit. That's why they say "AikiJujutsu." If the technique reaches a high-level, these two elements will occur at the same time. When the opponent attacks, he will be immediately thrown. That's the level of an expert.

Originally Jujutsu had both elements. If you look at Aiki and Jujutsu and you want to polish Aiki technique, the point is that you receive several types of attacks and, at the same time, you make the opponent's power zero. If you practice only one pattern of attack, then you lose the ability to apply techniques in different ways and they will become mere form. You must be able to respond to several types of attack. The crash of Sumo, the punch of Karate, and even the contact in rugby and soccer can be counted as types of attacks. A thrust from a small knife is the same. You have to respond. With each passing generation, ways of attack change. When somebody points a gun, at the moment the trigger is pulled, how can you respond? This is also a situation where energy meets energy. You have to think about Aiki technique, and deepen it that way.

There is an old proverb which is "Aiki yoroshikarazu." What it means is that if, in Kendo, the opponent assumes the seigan stance with his sword tip pointing at the opponent's eye, even if you don't want to assume the same stance as the opponent, you follow along and the opponent gains the advantage. Another example is if when a fight starts, your opponent attacks using boxing techniques, and you respond in this way even if you don't know boxing. You are drawn in by the opponent's energy. In this situation the proverb says, "yoroshikarazu" which means "not good." This is written as "Aiki" in the Edo period but with a different kanji.

Tesshu Yamaoka of Muto-ryu explained this concept in another way. He used the phrase, "matsu kaze no koto" (pine tree in the wind). A pine tree is standing and the wind blows and tries to knock it down, but the pine tree tries to resist the wind. The pine tree makes its own shape. Near the beach or in the mountains, trees make beautiful shapes. From the side of a pine tree, when the wind blows, the pine tree resists the wind and adopts a new shape. That is definitely

Aiki. But the wind doesn't want the pine tree to do so. It wants to knock down the tree and it focuses its power in that moment. This is the focusing power of Aiki. Aiki has different meanings from different perspectives.

In contrast to the study of technique, thinking about the way to live and about the goal of fighting it is Do and Bun. This includes thinking about when to fight or when to avoid fighting.

We Japanese pursuing Do are lucky to have Bushido as a point of reference. I think when you look at our predecessors in Bushido, how they lived, when they fought, what kind of fighting they did, how they died, you will see Do. The study of both Jutsu (technique) and Do is a means to study Aikido as a martial art. Of course, on the other hand, there are more people thinking about Aikido as a recreational sport or for exercise. This is problematic. Until Japan lost World War II everyone recognized Budo philosophy based on traditional culture. But modern society has forgotten the true meaning of Budo. This is a critical time for the Budo of traditional Japanese culture.

### **Existence of deities in Budo**

At this time I believe we need to rethink what Budo is. In order to do that, we need to think about the relationship between the deities and Budo; that is the fundamental point. The Japanese people have been evolving for two or three thousand years. In that history, there have been many battles. In those battles there have been Bushi (warriors), and those Bushi became the deities of the shrines. The deity of a shrine represents an ideal lifestyle for the Japanese people. In short, the deity represents the lifestyle of the Japanese people and the essence of their traditional culture.

The techniques of Budo are battle techniques. But what you are really fighting is a combination of mind and spirit. You need to study what kind of fighting the Bushi did and what kinds of spiritual feeling they had.

That is the deity of a shrine. The warrior deities of mythology are Kashima, Katori, Suwa, and Hachiman. This Dojo belongs to the Meiji Jingu that is dedicated to Meiji Tenno who modernized Japan, and who won the wars between China and Japan, as well as Russia and Japan. The goal of Budo is to think about the martial art, lifestyle, and spiritual essence of the god. For that you need to focus your mind and spirit. Then you use the martial arts techniques of modern society.

If you don't pray to the deities, martial arts will just be fighting technique and just violence or bullying. Or you will have no fighting spirit and just be exercising. That's why Budo became a recreational sport or "Budo" sport. They are not going to improve national consciousness.

This is a big problem. Essentially, I think Budo has to include prayers to the deities at a fundamental level. Having a shrine at a Dojo is very important but this point is not explained. It should be clarified for the younger generation. I think they will understand the meaning

and they will be encouraged.

When teaching Budo to people from other countries we should also explain why the Dojo has a shrine. If we don't do that, I don't think we'll know why we are teaching Budo.

### Eliminating ambiguous elements from Aikido training

Aikido Journal: I'd like to ask about some technical points. Today I observed your training. I saw you combine several elements in a step-by-step manner. But in most Aikido Dojos there's a pattern where the teacher comes in, shows the technique, and asks students to do it. The students don't understand the meaning and they just move. They end up sweating and thinking how good a beer would taste. They cannot see clearly what kinds of steps are needed or how they can improve. In Sumo they practice teppo, shiko and butsukari. They don't use too much form or technical training; they do more basic training. In Judo and Karate practitioners do the same. Only Aikido training repeats the technique while training. I think the way Aikido trains is not organized.

Inaba Sensei: Teachers have their own ideas regarding that point. They teach according to their point of view. But generally, I think the meaning of Budo has become fuzzy. In short, Budo has lost its goal. That is to say, the larger view of the idea of a country and how the Japanese people should be has been lost. They don't have a specific scheme; they do everything in a vague manner.

Even limiting the discussion to Aikido, to define Aiki merely as a technique is vague. That's why many people say Aiki is "love" or "harmony." I don't say that is bad, but in such meanings, you lose Aiki's martial aspect, and the practicing of techniques becomes less serious. The notion of how to live one's life, to draw an example from Bushido, is unclear too.

From the martial arts standpoint, the meaning of Aiki techniques is unclear. How are you going to train, how are you going to learn, and how are you going to train your mind. These points are extremely vague, and so now anything is permissible. Basically, I think we should focus our thinking on what Aiki is, on what we should do, what we are going to do, what kind of training we should have, etc.

In Budo there is a belief that a person's actions must match his words; also in life this belief exists. If somebody says that this is the way Do should be, that person must put it into practice. Words without actions do not have power behind them and will not influence others.

If you say that Japanese "Do" should be a certain way, it becomes very important how you put that into practice. In Japan, the traditional Budo spirit was destroyed after World War II. The value of fighting and the martial spirit were rejected because they were against peace. Fifty or sixty years have passed in this way of thinking. For fifty years after World War II, the Japanese have not managed their own country in an independent way. That's why people lack will power and an independent spirit. Japan cannot create a self-defense strategy. How are

we going to these basic traits? We need to go back to the basis of martial arts. The meaning of Budo is that each nation should develop a spirit of independence. A Budojo (martial arts Dojo) teaches the martial arts spirit to people in a social context. If these Dojos fulfill their role, the martial arts spirit will spread all over the nation. If that happens, I think the spirit will rise and society will be stable.

## Time is Life

Aikido Journal: Is it so that even if ordinary training only repeats the form, you should not complain, and you need to have a goal and find some way to train yourself?

Inaba Sensei: Yes. In that case, how can we find out what to do? You have to seriously think about what the Aikido you are doing is. In Budo you have to have tension. That begins first by thinking about timing, as I said before. Humans have only one life, which is limited. But from there, we are also chasing eternity. If you are not aware of this point, and do not care about timing, everything will be fuzzy and out of focus. If people do not care about their time, they will not care about other people's time and will not keep their promises. When you think about life and time you will keep the right amount of tension in ordinary life; at the same time, at the Dojo when you practice martial techniques that are related to life-and-death, you will develop a feeling of tension. This will be the basis of martial arts sensitivity, and Dojo training and ordinary life will merge.

The phrase "time is money" is a foreign idea; it's very American. But the idea that "time is life" is very important. This means, "I'm very young and I have a number of years to live." Even if you think this, tomorrow you may die. You should have that type of tension and you should think, "My life is limited." If you think your life is limited, then for anything you do now such as studying or Aikido, you will ask yourself, "What is this, what is truth, is that important, and is this something I want to spend my valuable time on?" Then I think you can find what truth is. If you complain about others, it means that deep down you are dependent on them. If something doesn't go well, you complain and put the blame on others.

Aikido Journal: I feel the process of Aikido training is very difficult compared to other martial arts. For example, in Sumo you will know if you are good or bad right away. In Karate, if you dodge an attack but get hit, you will think you are not good enough yet. But in Aikido, it's really difficult to realize that point.

Inaba Sensei: That is also a problem. How can you measure an opponent's power and your own technique and power? Here you have to measure these things with each technique you use. You need to understand, moment by moment. If you think hard about that, I can say that you'll have a clear understanding of your opponent and you will know yourself and you will improve. Also, if you look at Aikido, which doesn't have a long history from this point of view, you can say it is not a complete art. But if something is not complete, you can add to it and fix it.

You have to study the attacks of other martial arts and use this for serious training because

*Interview with Inaba Sensei  
by Aoyagi Eisuke*

this will affect your way of thinking about fighting. Anyway, the point is how you are going to react in a fight. You have to question what a real battle is, what is useful at that time and train to deal with these things everyday. That's the only way. Living is a continuous battle. In the battle of life you have to find your own way and you have to make your own technique for practicing your Do. That's why you study the martial techniques we have now and in the process you will also learn Budo. If you learn the forms of the martial techniques we have now and this causes you to lose your independence and creativity, then your priorities are mixed up. The culture will not develop. Actually, when you are blazing your own trail you need to create new martial techniques - you need new methods. As you search for the meaning of Budo, your ability to create techniques will be born. Therein lies the creativity of Budo and Bujutsu.

This is usually how the search for the way begins in daily practice. In order to search for the way and try to put it into practice, you need to create new techniques. Thus there is a correlation between Do and Jutsu. The connection becomes deeper and will grow.

\*\*\*\*\*


*Translated for the first time by Osamu & Karen Sekiguchi. Interview presented initially in Aikido Journal 120/2001*  
<http://www.AikidoJournal.com/article.php?articleID=107&highlight=inaba>

[Aikido Journal Home](#) --> [Interviews](#)  
[View Printable Version](#)

**Interview with Minoru Inaba Sensei**  
8th dan, Shiseikan Dojo, Meiji Jingu, Tokyo, Japan  
Aikido Journal 120

*Aikido doesn't have competitive matches.  
Always keep the feeling of being on the battlefield*

**AJ: Aikido doesn't have competitive matches, so what is the objective of training? How can we decide the goal of training?**



**Inaba Sensei:** It was one of Master Ueshiba's suggestions that aikido not have competitive matches. One explanation is that we don't want to make a champion or "number one" person. It's more important that individuals reach their own highest level.  
  
But if we think about it deeply this is probably not the reason. Real martial arts are not about winning or losing. They are about the kind of fighting you can do. A long time ago, if you lost a match, this was shameful. It was either win or die. In sword fighting this was especially true. Now perhaps this is true with guns. How can you fight with a gun?

Minoru Inaba of Shiseikan Dojo in Meiji Jingu

... (full article available for subscribers)

To read this article in its entirety please [login](#) or if you are not a member [click here](#) to subscribe.

[Contact Us](#) - [Tell your friends](#) - [Free newsletter](#) - [Links](#)  
[Link To Us](#) - [Privacy and Security](#) - [Take Our Survey](#)  
Copyright © 2001 Aikido Journal. All rights reserved.

Currently available for members at: <http://members.aikidojournal.com/private/interview-with-minoru-inaba/>

Text in black was partially retranslated in Autumn 2015 by efforts and cooperation between Robert Cowham, Endo Ikuhiro, Myriam Rees, Jonathan Witztum and Adam Radecki.

Text in gray is waiting for retranslation in 2016.

Re-translation and publication on ISBA website is made due to kind permission of Stanley Praning given to Robert Cowham on 8th of October 2015.