



Why Do We Practice A Technique That We Feel Doesn't Work?

**Guy Needler,
Wa Shin Kan writes:**

Why do we practice a technique that we feel doesn't work? How would I use this in the street?

This is an interesting question and one that many students of Aikido (and other martial arts) ask themselves from time to time. It is essential that we make the effort to analyse ourselves relative to such questions as it puts the technique we are practicing into perspective.

Essentially 90% of all martial arts is body conditioning with the remainder being the martial aspects. It is only through conditioning the body in all aspects of technique, effective and partially effective that the body can respond in a true reactionary way that is the culmination of all body conditioning work. In the dojo both tori and uke work on technique in a set number of predictable ways, ways in which, on their own, require predetermined attacks and predetermined techniques in response. These in themselves are effective in their own right, but as we all know, no one person will attack in the same way twice and attacks in the street will follow no predetermined method. It is because of this that the Aikido student needs to condition the body in all aspects of attack and response as the

body will ultimately respond with a mixture of taisabaki and or technique, provided "mushin" or empty mind" is employed making the technique reactionary rather than premeditated.



Martial Arts are by definition "The Arts Of Killing" and it is through the knowledge of how to kill (or remove life) that the Martial Artist can disable an opponent without significant risk to themselves and their opponent. This "Do" or peaceful side of the art illustrates respect between two people. Martial Arts that include weapons should be practiced to perfection, including those moves we feel are not appropriate as again it conditions the body to move in all ways allowing the weapon user to dispatch his opponent in as fast and as painless a way as possible. The level of painlessness achieved in the dispatching of an opponent is also a mark of respect for the opponent as the true Martial Artist does not wish to inflict pain on anyone. The true reason here is that the ultimate desire of the martial artist is to achieve peace,

this can only be done through understanding how to disable or kill effectively which ultimately results in the realisation of the futility of aggression, and that life, all life is sacred.

This is the same for the Aikido student. Through working together tori and uke give themselves to each other and in turn receive respect from each other. This respect for other people becomes ingrained in the personality of the Aikidoka as they continue to practice a martial art that is, to my mind, both one of the most devastating in terms of what it can do the human body and spiritual as we learn to respect our skills and prefer not to use them outside the dojo therefore respecting others. It is this desire to not use aggression in any form, be it mental, verbal or physical, that makes the true Aikidoka a better person.

So, why do we practice a technique that we feel doesn't work? Because it is part of walking the path to fully understanding the martial art, which in itself is a milestone towards self realisation, affording respect to others and ultimately achieving peace within the self and with others.

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Ask a Shidojin

This month's question was sent in by Neil Mould, Staines Dojo:

"In our dojos, what methods can we use to develop the connection / contact between tori & uke?"

Peter Brown, Kyu Shin Kan

The first thing we need to consider as instructor is the two different aspects of contact, and then we need to understand the requirement of the student.

The first aspect of contact is physical. This is easy to demonstrate to all levels of Aikidoka: in everyday life we pick up/grip objects. So we practice this continuously.

The new student begins this practice from day one, you emphasize that by gripping with the little finger first then all other fingers a

grip is performed. This is best practiced by holding bokken, jo or tanto.

Because of space for this answer I will move on to the second aspect of connection/contact, this is not physical but mental. To practice this I teach that an understanding of the technique from the view point as uke is essential. As the uke you start to realise were you body should be in regards to various techniques. You begin to understand that to maintain the physical contact the grip is only a small part of the package: your feet play a bigger role. Moving your body correctly helps you to

maintain a better connection.

As we are the same person, being tori or uke we simply adapt the same body position/feeling to the technique, so in an ideal world with two students practicing in the same way the connection is formed.

The only problem with this is that unlike learning a technique, you are told that this is the hand position or foot position, trying to understand contact/connection has to be experienced, it can't be written down. It is something you need to feel.

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Mario Falaschi, Ren Shin Kan

All training sessions begin with basic techniques, i.e. / with uke taking firm hold of tori's wrists, arms, shoulder etc., and this initial contact forces tori to move in such a way so as to break / upset uke's posture in order for them to apply technique. Uke needs to maintain constant contact with his partner and move with him always with the intention of regaining their own posture in order to look for an opening and continue with the attack.

The problem some people have when practicing is that they pre-empt the technique and move in such a way as to either turn their back on their partner or even worse perform a break fall before the technique is applied fully (taking a dive) effectively giving up.

The whole point of keeping contact from uke's point of view is to prevent tori from striking them and to maintain their own posture by moving with the technique always with the intention of gaining the upper hand,

that is not to say that this should develop into a battle for supremacy but both partners should work together in harmony and help each other to improve their Aikido.

By practicing in this manner your body art will develop so that when you take part in advanced practice where contact is minimal, or even non-existent, your body will move in such a way that you can absorb any technique safely and without injury.