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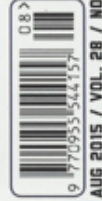
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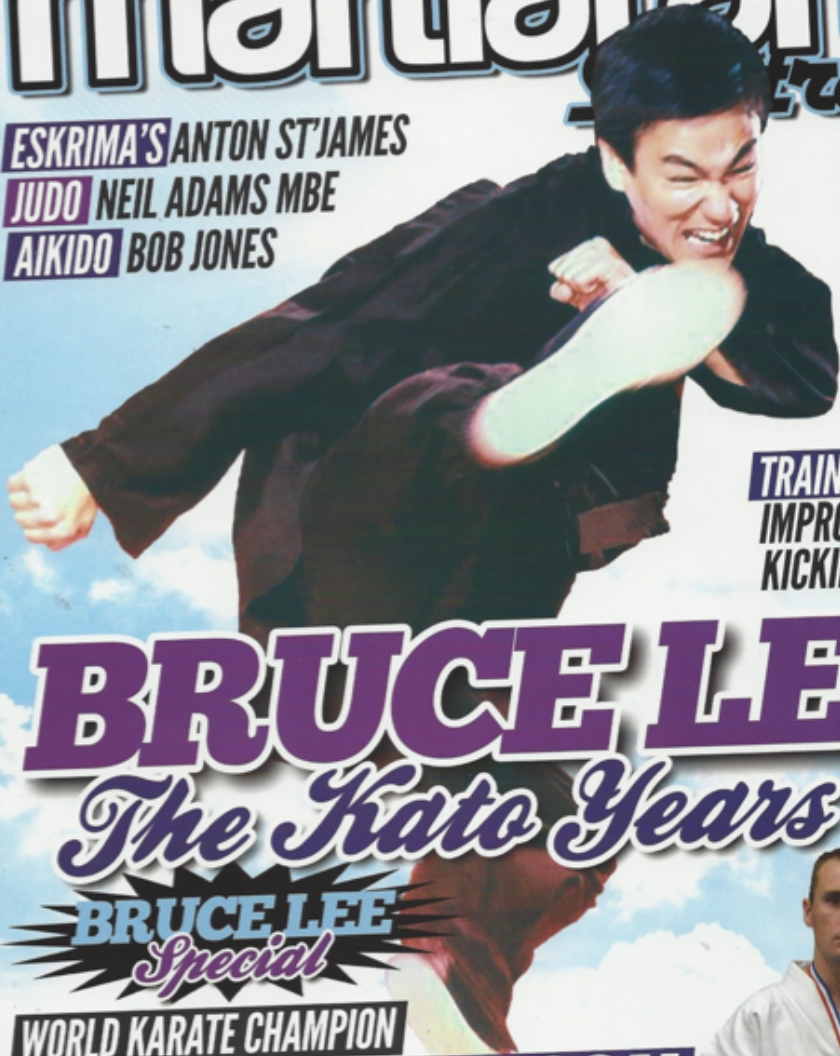
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## Spirit of the Samurai

In Aikido individuals, must also learn that it is not just techniques that they have to master. The development of “self” is also an important factor in the development of a true martial artist. Without this holistic approach to development, maximum effect can not be achieved.

These developmental aspects include Technical Principles, Physical, Psychological, Emotional and Sociological. Let’s investigate these with an objective common sense approach.

### Technical Principles

Technical development is the ability of the student to understand the underlying key skills of good technique. In Aikido there are five key skills: Posture, Avoidance, Distance, Balance, and Direction.

### Shizentai / Posture

Shizentai is the understanding of personal balance through good posture. The ability to provide a positive stance that is flexible and reactive to an aggressor’s movement is essential. Good posture must be maintained throughout the execution of a technique. It should be visible before, during and after every technique. Posture should be flexible to respond to attack or defence, and provides the core stability and control for the execution of technique. Remember to always maintain centre at all times.



Dan White 1st Dan demonstrating excellent posture following a Sumi Otoshi

### **Tai Sabaki (Avoidance) and Tsukuri (Entering movement)**

Tai Sabaki and Tsukuri combine initial avoiding movement with entering movement. This combination ensures correct positioning for the effective execution of technique. In Aikido, especially, the effective use of avoiding movement provides the space and opportunity to produce effective technique.



Vanda Fairchild 5th Dan demonstrating Tai Sabaki and Kuzushi prior to applying Kote Gaeshi

### **Distance or Maai**

Distance or Maai is based on the concept that each of the Japanese martial arts has an optimum distance. Judo is close quarter, then Karate, Aikido, Kendo and Kyudo each in turn is a greater distance from the opponent. Maintaining an effective distance is crucial to performing good technique, too close and power generation is lost, too far and effective timing is also lost.



## Maintaining effective striking distance Danielle Jones 3rd Dan

### Balance or Kuzushi

In Aikido, this is the first aggressive principle, where Tori (thrower) begins to take control of their opponent by destroying the attacker's balance. The most effective way to perform Kuzushi is to pin the opponent first, prior to the balance break. Pinning moves an opponent's weight from their centre to the front or back foot thus restricting movement. In Aikido there are primary and secondary balance breaking directions which provide opportunity to destroy an opponent's posture.



Mike Smith 7th Dan using Shomen Ate to effect good Kuzushi

### Direction and Kake (execution of technique)

The direction of throw is a vital element. To maximise effort, Tori should always work through an opponent's weak lines. Aligning Tori's strongest posture with their opponent's weakest immediately prior to the final execution of the technique.

The Technical principles involve the understanding and acquisition of skill. The ability to deliver techniques will depend largely on the adaptability of the practitioner.



Scott Pearce 2<sup>nd</sup> Dan (GB) performing Embu at the 2013 World Championships demonstrating perfect execution of technique

The development of skilful practice is depends on four main factors.

- The experience and communication skills of the coach
- The development of the individuals' central nervous system and the ability of the body to receive and store information
- Physical maturity of the student and their ability to translate information into practical application and activity.
- Prior experience of the student and the skills they have already experienced.

Getting the key principles embedded in practice is fundamental to the development of Aikido the rest is window dressing. In the next issue we will begin to investigate the application of these principles through basic Aikido techniques.

### **Physical Development**

Physical attributes are a crucial element in the delivery of each throw and the development of the individual's Aikido.

The five key elements of physical development are Flexibility, Endurance, Speed, Power and Timing. In order to produce the perfect throw each of the five elements need to be perfect. Physical strength is no substitute for good technique. Indeed some practitioners try substitute strength for technique with negative consequences.

### **Flexibility**

Increased flexibility facilitates speed and agility that are key ingredients in improving movement and range thus increasing the effectiveness of the technique.

## Endurance

Endurance is the ability for sustained practice. It is the means by which the body, through training, makes effective use of oxygen as an energy source. The maximisation of aerobic, anaerobic and muscular endurance provides for effective sustained practice.

## Speed

Speed is a major component of all combat sports. The most important aspect of speed relates to reaction time - the time that elapses between the initial attack and the response. Speed should be calculated in relation to distance but is essential to ensure effective avoiding action.

## Power

Power, a controversial element for some Aikidoka. The definition of power is strength x speed. Strength being the ability of muscles to move the body. The key to any good martial arts practice is to generate large quantities of power and apply to technique. Once achieved this is an unstoppable combination. We must also remember that all power is generated from the hips and centre and not the arms.

## Timing

Finally timing or co-ordination, the ability to deliver a technique at the most appropriate moment to maximise efficiency. Without this element the effectiveness of technique will diminish.

Physical development is key to both practice and performance, we must always bear in mind the term "Fit for Purpose", training regimes have to be related to need.



Mark Watson 3rd Dan and Simon Jones 2nd Dan demonstrating Kokyu Nage with intense physical endeavour at the World Championships 2003.

## Psychological Aspects

Psychological developments support the mental approach to training providing the practitioner with enhanced competencies. Non physical development is essential for both effective practice and performance. Aikido is ideally suited to develop these attributes as it has maintained a more traditional philosophy. This philosophy can be blended with modern approaches to sport psychology to provide a rounded and well balanced approach to training. The core psychologic characteristics are relevant for all sports but crucial to martial sports.

Awareness determines the ability to recognise danger, collect and assess information quickly and determine an appropriate response. This is supported by developing concentration which allows focus thus maximising mental flexibility and body control.



Total concentration on learning which they transfer to practice  
Keith McLean, Dave Norris and Marty Knocker at the Dublin Seminar 2015.

The discipline of commitment and dedication must be instilled in practice. Without commitment only limited progress can be achieved.

Commitment and dedication grow alongside confidence. Individuals need to have self assurance in their ability to perform. Confidence is a positive attribute which needs to be developed, but tempered with a sense of proportion and humility. Over confidence can lead to complacency.

## Sociological Aspects

Sociological aspects are required for the practitioner to link the art to “daily life” to give it meaning outside the dojo and provide an environment for the practitioner to maximise training.

Traits, such as generosity, humility, respect, loyalty and integrity are key behaviours in a true student of Aikido. These provide for a rounded human being and help eradicate self-interest, selfishness and arrogance.

During my formative years, I was lucky to have extremely good teachers who not only taught excellent technique but gave students a sense of worth and instilled a sound ethical base. Amongst these Mike Smith 7th Dan deserves a special mention as a unique human being and inspirational teacher

## Emotional Characteristics

Emotional development focuses on a range of attributes that underpin a well-balanced individual.

The development of emotional robustness is essential so practitioners are able to control emotional responses and the concept of Mushin Mugamae or empty mind. This is the technique of producing a totally automated response without conscious thought.

To have control of body and mind includes the mastery of ones emotional response both during practice and as part of “daily life”.



Shaun Hoddy 6<sup>th</sup> Dan exercising total control

In addition practitioners should be assertive not aggressive, have courage and not be subject to peer pressure, to have a positive outlook and be patient and empathetic.



Mick Pratt 4<sup>th</sup> Dan and Paul Carr 3<sup>rd</sup> Dan bringing together all aspects of training to become World Embu Champions 2011.



To master Aikido, whether as a martial art or martial sport, an individual must develop the physical and technical aspects and be able to grow spiritually, morally and ethically.



Bob Jones 7<sup>th</sup> Dan getting to the finer points.

Thanks to Mark Cheevers of Greenhills Tomiki Aikido Club for many of the photographs

**Written by Bob Jones**