

Kokyu Power

呼吸力

Kokyu Power Does Not Diminish

In the first chapter, I primarily discussed strategy as it relates to Aikido. You now have some understanding, however general, of how Aikido can be useful in a real fight. But moving according to the precepts of strategy isn't always easy. The reason is that in Aikido there are rather unique methods of using power and of moving the body. If you don't acquire these skills you won't be able to move according to strategic principles. If you simply move around without any knowledge of what you are doing, there's no way that you will manage to use Aikido techniques.

One of the distinctive features of Aikido is its extremely efficient use of power. In demonstrations, it looks as though the opponents are thrown around with such ease that everyone gets the feeling that there must be something mysterious going on.



Actually, in a demonstration given by students of Aikido, the back is completely straight, the shoulders are dropped, and the participants assume a very sharp looking posture. Some people who witness a demonstration come away with the impression that Aikido is highly stylized. There is certainly

nothing of the brute strength and straining muscles that one normally associates with throwing people around.

In fact, this is one of the most important aspects of Aikido. The graceful movements have nothing to do with laziness, nor is the perfect posture a result of striving for stylized beauty. Then why are they important? Well, in order to produce great power, an effective posture is one in which your back is straight, your shoulders are down and your feet are firmly planted on the ground. In other words, moving your body while maintaining this type of posture will bring forth a much more powerful force than can be produced through muscular strength alone.

This is not to say that there is no use of power in Aikido. If anything, we use a lot of it. However, it is not power in the normal sense that people think of it, produced by tensing the entire body and straining the muscles. In Aikido, we use terms like “kokyu power” or “focused power” to refer to the power that we develop.

The distinctive feature of kokyu power is that it is not affected by age. No matter how hard one trains, muscular power will naturally deteriorate with age but this doesn't happen with kokyu power. As long as one continues to do the proper training, kokyu power can be used regardless of one's age.

I, myself, am a good example of this. I am well over 70 years of age, my stature is small and I don't exactly have big bulging muscles. And yet, just by

moving slightly, I toss around all those vibrant young men and everybody is surprised. Some people wonder if I'm not using some sort of mysterious technique. But truthfully, it's not mysterious or anything else. I am using kokyu power.

Kokyu power is produced when we push ourselves to the limit, making the most efficient use of the capabilities that lie within our own bodies. Consequently, anybody, no matter what kind of person, can use kokyu power. The only problem is whether or not you practise in such a way as to develop it.

Another important point is that kokyu power is not limited to Aikido alone. Originally, it was certainly a part of all Japanese martial arts. While it was referred to by different names, Judo, Karate or any of the various other martial arts all had ways of practising kokyu power. But somewhere along the line it fell into disuse. I believe that therein lies the decline of Japanese martial arts. So in this chapter I would like to discuss kokyu power, the basis of Aikido.

Center Power: Maintaining the Body's Axis

The human body can produce incredible power naturally. A good example is the enormous strength that people often show at the scene of a fire. In extreme situations, the unconscious takes over complete control of the body's functioning and even an old granny can display enough strength to lift up a large chest of drawers by herself. This power comes from the use of the entire body.

Yet usually, when we move our hands we rely solely on the muscles of the arms and shoulders, and when we move our feet, we typically rely solely on the muscles of the legs. In short, we only use the strength of each individual part. This places quite a burden on these muscles and leaves us with a rather inefficient method of using power.

As for what Aikido calls "kokyu power", this is something that is inherent in all human beings. It is the manifestation, at will, of power which is derived from the entire body.

The basis of kokyu power is "center power", which is the power that keeps the body's center line absolutely straight. For the most part, our center lines are actually twisted, even though we claim to stand up straight. If we truly do

stand up straight for a moment and make our center line strong, as soon as we move just a little we relax this feeling and go back to our normal pattern.

In Aikido, the first thing we do is training to strengthen this axis, this center line of the body. Specifically, we train in order to develop one straight line between the head, the hips and the tips of the toes.

Often in practising nikajo, when the technique doesn't work, I'll hold the person's hips from behind and it will work instantly. This is because I am supporting his center line, which becomes relaxed as he tries to move. Of course, he must learn to do this himself without any outside help.

Just what kind of training should you do in order to cultivate this center power? Well, in Yoshinkan we attach great importance to practising **kamae**¹, which is training for center power. In the kamae position, both hands, both feet, the hips and the head all come together in one line. Then, the center of gravity is placed along the perpendicular axis which runs directly down from the head.

From a beginner's point of view, maintaining this posture is quite an imposing expectation. At first, they have no concept of where their own center of gravity lies and they put so much power into their arms and legs that they shake all over the place. However, through practice they build up a very solid center

¹ **Kamae** literally means "posture" but is used to refer to the basic stance in Yoshinkan Aikido. [Translator's note.]

line, and then they go on to acquire a basic stance which can be used to produce immense power.

If your central axis is unsteady, you won't be able to make any technique work. Always remember that every one of the basics in Aikido is geared toward the maintenance of this center line.

Grip The Ground With Your Feet

As I've said many times before, the basis of Aikido is center power. Firmly stabilizing the body with a strong central axis allows for a great variety of body movements, and by connecting these with **focused power**² and kokyu power, incredible power can be produced.

This is where we find the answer to the question of why Aikido has no kicking techniques. Ueshiba Sensei used to say: "Kicking leaves you momentarily on

² For an explanation of **focused power**, see the discussion on page 84 entitled "Developing The Focused Power Of The Entire Body." [Translator's note.]

one foot, and for that moment you are in a very weak position. If you were to be swept off your feet, you would be finished. This is why lifting your feet off the ground is crazy." If the opponent comes in for an attack and your feet are firmly planted on the ground, you can either retreat or move in. If one foot is lifted up, however, there's no way you will be able to move.



One of the things that is absolutely fundamental is to always assume a stable posture. To do this, you have to leave your feet flat on the ground. Move by

sliding your feet and maintain contact with the ground. The reason for this is to avoid the uneven shifting of your center of gravity. At the same time, however, as long as you can maintain a stable posture then it's okay to be on one foot. But realistically, you have a problem since the ground isn't always level.

If you ever get into a fight outdoors, you'll run into problems if you slide your feet as though you were still on tatami mats. Inevitably, you will need to lift your foot. However, even when you do lift your foot, the important thing is whether you can move and keep your center of gravity steady, just as you would if your feet were sliding along the floor.

During training, Ueshiba Sensei would often assume a one-legged stance and tell us to come at him. He was showing us that one must always assume a stable stance by moving the center of gravity freely at will.

If you reach the point where you can do this, lifting a foot or standing on one leg won't be a concern to you. However, until you've attained this ability, keep your feet planted on the ground at all times and practise firmly supporting your body. No matter how much they mimic their teachers, those who can't control the movement of their center of gravity are headed for disaster.