

BODO ROEDEL

AIKIDO

武
術

THE BASICS

TECHNIQUES
PRINCIPLES
CONCEPT

MEYER
& MEYER
SPORT

Aikido – The Basics

To make reading easier this book has been written using exclusively the male form of the personal pronoun. This should be understood to include the female form as well.

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Dr. Bodo Roedel
In collaboration with
Nadja Gaertel and Susen Werner

Aikido - The Basics

Techniques, Principles, Concept



ikkyo omote waza

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The Reason for a Book About Aikido

The initial thoughts about this book occurred in 2007 during one of Christian Tissier's sensei summer seminars on the side of a swimming pool in the Côte d'Azur. Contributing to the first reflections regarding the content of the book were Nadja Gaertel, Martina Dorka, Susen Werner and Dieter Becker.

When we asked ourselves what a book about the basics of Aikido should contain, we soon were all absolutely agreed that it should not only contain the basic knowledge of the techniques that a beginner in Aikido would particularly need – for example foot movements, forward rolls etc and the details of the techniques – but that there should also be something about the background of the concept of Aikido.

The dictionary defines **concept** as a clearly derived general idea or a plan. The book should also cover, in a clear form, just which plan is applicable to Aikido. This should be based on thoughts that have been developed, bit-by-bit, so that they are therefore clearly understandable and executable by everyone.

As a result, this book has three aims. First of all, it is there to support those who have set out on the road to learning Aikido. Secondly, maybe it can also provide inspiration to those who have been devoting themselves to the art and have been practicing Aikido for some time already. Throughout the book, you will find frequent references as to why there are various different styles in Aikido. The main reason for this (in my opinion) does not lie in the various technical details – this is only the case on first sight. A much deeper reason lies in the differences of concept in the various styles, irrespective of whether they are formulated explicitly or only implicitly – or, in the worst case, not even known about by pupils and their instructors.

In other words, it is precisely the conceptual background that determines the different styles in Aikido. Each style can well be consistent and more or less built up logically and still remain executable. If you look at the underlying concept, there is no longer a question of whether this or that technique functions well, but a question of what opportunities for development exist on the basis of each concept. In Aikido, when you look at the various considerations in this aspect, then you will find considerable differences in quality.

At this point, I don't wish to hide the fact that my own heart reaches out for a concept in Aikido that fulfills at least three demands:

- It exists (something that doesn't always immediately go without saying) and can be formulated and checked.
- It is logical (i.e., is consistent within itself) and executable.
- It lends itself to Aikido as a demanding form of Martial Art and the art of movement.

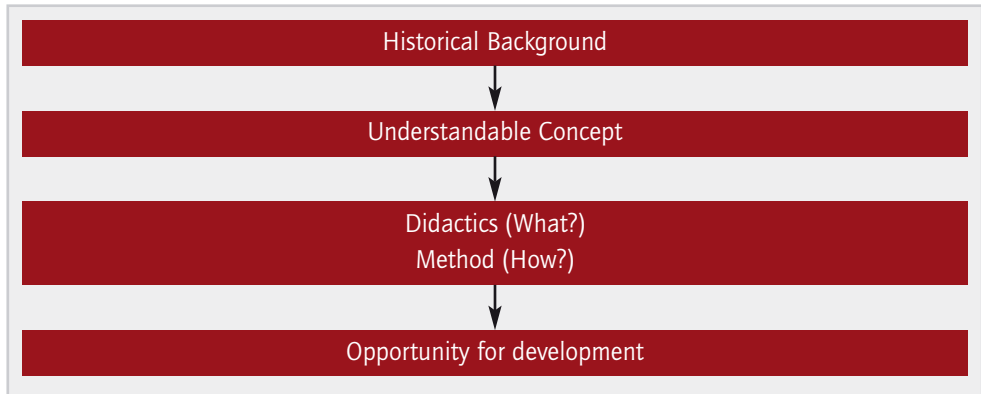
As a third aim I also hope that this book will provide interesting suggestions for lessons carried out by Aikido instructors.

For every instructor there should be two questions regarding the main emphasis in the development of one's own Aikido. "What do I do?" and "Why am I doing it this way?" Because there is no competition in Aikido, these two questions are absolutely central for an interesting Aikido training session. The criterion that differentiates the pro from the layman is when an instructor can provide answers to these questions. Nobody would let someone else repair his automobile if he couldn't give an answer to these two questions. It is the same in educational theory: The pro is distinguishable from the layman by using his actions in a reflective and explanative manner – i.e., when he can answer the two questions referred to earlier. Therefore why shouldn't we also demand this of an Aikido instructor, because after all every Martial Art is also a form of education – but more on this later.

In light of the examination of the conceptual background, (hopefully) it will become clear that Aikido instruction concerns the application of both intelligent didactics (What is being instructed?) and method (How is it being instructed?), especially when one wants to go deeply into the subject of Aikido. If the Aikido instruction is limited to demonstrating and copying, then the principles of Aikido will remain unknown to many. Otherwise, Aikido would seem to be merely a collection of tricks and appear as more or less elegantly executed movements – and many opportunities of developing it further would become lost.

From this point of view, it is no coincidence that the basic thoughts for this book emerged during one of Christian Tissier's sensei courses, because he is not only a master of the techniques but also a master of Aikido didactics and method.

Like no other, he is always able to see the principles behind Aikido from new angles, and thus allows his pupils the possibility of recognizing and understanding them. I owe him my special thanks, because, without his instruction, my own development in exercising Aikido both as a pupil of his and as an instructor would not be so complete.



Aikido, as it can be taught today and as it is described in this book, is based on links between these points.

A book about the basics of Aikido must contain numerous technical details. But because of obvious limitations, it cannot cover all the interesting technical aspects of the art. The aspects that I have included have been chosen because I believe they are particularly worthy of mention and that they usefully support the learning and teaching process for the person practicing Aikido. Along with the main emphasis of the chosen selection, there will always be a reduction of the Aikido techniques that can be covered in such a book. Of course, I could have chosen to construct it differently, so there can be no claim to raise any objections regarding exclusivity or completeness. Naturally, a book about the art of movement reaches its limits when it comes to expressing feeling for movement in the techniques – because, unfortunately, feelings in the medium of a book can only be described and not pictured or illustrated. I, also, could not resolve this paradox.

The following have acted as training partners in this book:



Martina Dorka



Nadja Gaertel



Targan Kursun



Thomas Puetz



Susen Werner

I owe them hearty thanks for their efforts and patience.

The photographs on pages 15, 24, 31 and 327 were taken by Maria Plevaya. Those on pages 17, 29, 91, 237, 241 and 329 by Marc Schroeder. For the use of these photos may I also give my thanks. The photograph on page 325 is by Dr. Bodo Roedel. All the other photos were taken by Iris Pohl (www.iris-pohl.de).

My particular thanks goes to Nadja Gaertel for providing Chapter 1.1 and for her intensive work in editing the whole text in the book. Similarly, thanks go to Susen Werner who wrote and illustrated Chapter 9.1.

Dr. Bodo Roedel

Foreword by Christian Tissier shihan, 7th dan aikikai

I know Bodo Roedel as a considerate, reliable man who is always loyal to our common interest and me. He, therefore, has the necessary characteristics that allow a pupil to look forward to many years of training without worrying about achieving a direct aim - or rather I should say they look forward to cherishing the continual repetition of the 'moment'. Always attentive, he returns untiringly from the headway we have made together to go on and discover new things.

To take on a young man, to teach him firstly the basics and then the finer points of Aikido, to watch him as he develops into a fine person capable of passing on his knowledge – this was an experience that was important to me and makes one very aware of one's own position and responsibility.



Passing on knowledge is an exchange process. This exchange process opened up new horizons for me and inspired me: I thank him for this – I thank all my pupils similarly. The spontaneous discussion and the justified questions that came as well as the thoughts that led to this book are all evidence of the variety and the many possible viewpoints surrounding this subject.

The ability required for its achievement is equally various. Bodo Roedel possesses very many of these abilities and it is surely also the case that he has called on his knowledge from his background as a Doctor of Education for his book. I wish him all success with this book.

Christian Tissier

Notes About the Content of the Book

The book has nine chapters with the following content:

Chapter 1: This chapter describes what constitutes Aikido and how Aikido is defined. Aikido is also explained in contrast to other sporting Martial Arts forms. This section of the chapter was written by Nadja Gaertel.

Chapter 2: The basic foot movements are covered. These appear continually in all Aikido techniques i.e., when one knows the basic foot techniques, one can understand and learn new techniques more rapidly. Therefore, the foot movements are shown as movements with an exercise partner. Similarly, the relationship of Aikido with the movements of a sword is compared.

Chapter 3: This chapter covers the most important hand movements required in Aikido. Just like the foot movements, certain hand and arm movements are continuously being mentioned in Aikido. It is interesting to look at these in isolation in order to understand the structure of Aikido techniques.

Chapter 4: The so-called 'working up' of the Aikido techniques ('Working on the construction' or 'Working on one's own form') is a considerably important element in the learning process for Aikido. Chapter 4 explains the meaning behind this. Numerous examples are given.

Chapter 5: This chapter includes important details of all the basic techniques. The details should help one to understand the techniques more easily and simplify learning Aikido.

Chapter 6: All Aikido techniques are based on the same principles. While in Chapter 5 the specific technical details were described, the 'metalevel' of techniques in Aikido can be addressed.

Chapter 7: Chapter 7 describes the learning process in Aikido with, in particular, the roles of defender and attacker being covered. In Aikido there is a certain number of basic techniques. These basic techniques are always learnt with identical follow-on sequences.

Chapter 8: It is not only the person carrying out an Aikido technique that learns – the attacker also learns at the same time. Because both of them exercise together constructively, they are dependent on each other for the developments they make. For this reason, this chapter is devoted to the most important elements in the learning process for the attacker.

Chapter 9: Here you will find additional information about Aikido and Aikido training rounding off the book. Susen Werner wrote Section 9.1 in this chapter.

So that reading the text is made as fluid as possible, the person practicing Aikido is shown as '*Aikido-ka*' (covering both male and female). The techniques and attacks are labeled with their Japanese names to avoid difficult translations. You will find the terms and their meanings either directly in the text or in a glossary at the end of the book (see Page 334). The attacker is called *Uke* (from the Japanese verb *ukeru* = to receive i.e., Uke is the person who receives the technique). The defender is called *Tori* (from the Japanese verb *toru* = to take, seize, catch).

The reader should note that perspective in the photos has been changed in part for the various movement sequences in order to illustrate certain details better.



Christian Tissier and Bodo Roedel – irimi nage



"Art is not a thing - it is a way."

Elbert Hubbard



1 What is Aikido?

- What do the characters "*ai-ki-do*" mean?
 - What is the viewpoint of this book regarding explanation of the basics in Aikido?
- How does Aikido compare to other Martial Arts and sports?

According to the way that any *Aikido-ka* tries to examine Aikido, an answer to the question of what Aikido is all about is always varied. In other words, it is difficult to give a generally final definition of Aikido that everyone can really agree with. Perhaps there are as many definitions of Aikido as there are people practicing Aikido, because, of course, each individual can have his own personal viewpoint.

In the following passages are several possible ways of looking at Aikido. Later in the book we will survey, time and again, the various aspects of this more deeply and in greater detail.

For the onlooker, Aikido is an array of highly developed and effective techniques for self-defense.

The term - "highly developed" - means that lifts and levers are cleverly used in order to achieve the maximum effect with the least effort.

All the techniques are based on the same principles (see Chapter 6). The basis of Aikido is founded on natural and simple movements – thus, anyone can learn Aikido. In this context, "natural" means that the movements are all executed in a radius about the body that the *Aikido-ka* determines and is similar to that which he is used to in daily life. In this perspective, the aim of Aikido training is to continually improve the execution of the techniques. Work topics are:

- relaxed movement,
- learning to do flowing movements,
- exercising hard and appropriately schooling the leg muscles, and
- using the hands and arms correctly.

“Internally”, Aikido is a method to be worked up by oneself. This includes, for example, exercising:

- the concentration,
- staying power,
- the ability to assert oneself,
- the ability to cooperate as well as...
- ...self confidence

The first perspective shows that Aikido is all about the art of movement – one can truly call Aikido a ‘sport’. Aikido differs from techniques of meditation like e.g., *zen*, even though Aikido possesses meditative elements (see Page 329).

The second perspective illustrates that Aikido offers the possibility to practice one’s mental senses – in the broadest sense, Aikido here is a method of developing the personality. Both of these perspectives are, of course, mutually conditional on each other. The internal state of mind influences the movement and vice versa. This is also an explanation for the literal term ‘fighting art’ (martial art). Inter alia, the term ‘art’ means that the external movements reflect the internal state and this is what is expressed by the *Aikido-ka* – similar to recognizing the expression achieved by a painter in a work of art. Of course, the point mentioned above concerning the mental senses can be found in many types of sport.

If one takes a perspective beyond the first and second ones, one can begin to get close to the nature of Aikido, because the first two alone do not suffice as a full explanation. Aikido gives one the opportunity to work together constructively with other people and to try to carry out an exchange – in this sense Aikido is a form of intensive communication. One could almost call it ‘body dialogue’.

This makes it clear how Aikido differs from other types of sport and in particular from other forms of martial art. After all, Aikido is the only martial art where anyone who is practicing it accepts that 50% of the time they will lose the bout, and despite this, they will use the experience to make progress for themselves and others.

Because, in Aikido, there are always at least two people exercising together, one can also think about Aikido from an ethical perspective. With this in mind, one can try to answer the questions “What should I do?” and “How should I proceed?”

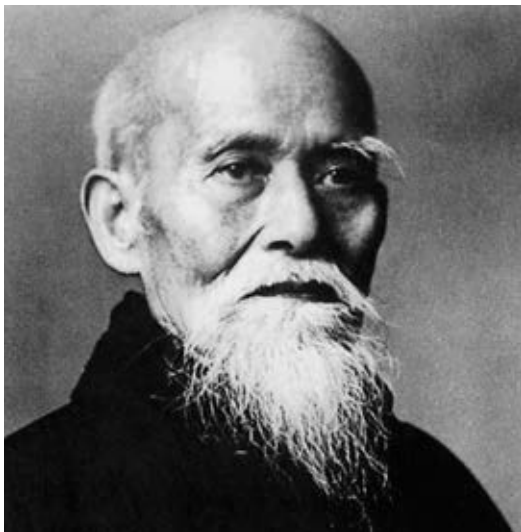
In Aikido there is an easy answer for this: "Defend yourself when you are being attacked – however, also call on the attacker to stop his actions in time before you injure him. React to the movements accordingly and don't cause more injury than is absolutely necessary so that you, yourself, remain unhurt."

If you look at the Japanese word "Aikido" in an etymological dictionary, you will find the following definition:

The syllable "ai" means 'joining', 'unifying', 'harmonizing'. Sometimes "ai" is translated as 'love'. The syllable "ki" means 'feeling', 'purpose', 'spirit', 'life energy' (see Page 22) and the syllable "do" approximates 'way' – in the sense of a process one has to go through in order to achieve physical and mental development. Thus, the meaning of the combined first two syllables is "to unite opposite intentions or powers in harmony". Therefore, one possible translation of Aikido could be: the way or the method of uniting (opposite) powers in harmony.



Japanese characters for ai-ki-do



Morihei Ueshiba

When all is said and done, one can approach the question of what Aikido is by having a look at the history of Aikido. Seen from an historical perspective, Aikido is a classical Japanese martial art – so-called *Budo* - like, for example also *Judo* or *Karate-do*. It was created in the 20th Century by the Japanese Morihei Ueshiba (1883-1969) as a synthesis of various martial arts (see Page 322).

The historical heart of Aikido, therefore, lies in the long tradition of Japanese martial arts. In the meanwhile, Aikido has spread across the world and other cultures have influenced it. This is also a reason why Aikido has developed in various different directions and is continuing to be developed.

What is Aikido? A few common perspectives			
Onlooker's Perspective	Internal Perspective	Higher Perspective	Historical Perspective
Self-defense	Concentration	Communication	Classic <i>Budo</i>
Martial Art	Self-confidence	Dialogue	Historical Traditions
Art of Movement	Development of the Personality	Exchange	Further Modern Development
Sport	Technique as a Method of Internal Work	Learning with each other- Against each other	Different styles
Life Form/Ethics – Education – Self-development			

What is ki?

The elements of the “*ai*” and “*do*” in the word Aikido are relatively easily explained. The “*ki*” syllable in the word needs some further mention, as there is much scope for more interpretation here. Generally, “*ki*” is (as seen from a Far Eastern viewpoint) translated as ‘feeling’, ‘purpose/intention’, ‘life energy’ or ‘vitality’. The Chinese for it is “*chi*” (as in *tai chi* – the Chinese Art of Movement); the Indian word for it is *prana*. In particular, the Chinese version refers to a concept of flowing energy and forces, as used in Chinese traditional medicine.

The source of “*ki*” is a point just below the navel – the so-called *kikai-tanden* or *hara*. Literally translated it means the “sea of energy”. Every person has access to his “*ki*”. Differences in the strength of the life energy or vitality and the ability to use “*ki*” exist when blockages or tension obstruct the flow of “*ki*” through the body. Traditional Chinese medicine therefore sees this state as a cause of illness.

Some *Aikido-ka* bring their interpretation of life energy so far as to literally want to let their “*ki*” flow and attempt to ‘let it out’ of the body – this would then akin it to an effective force.

For Aikido pupils from Western countries, it is easier to understand (and at the same time appear less esoteric) if "ki" is defined by using the following: The ability to assert oneself, determination, willpower, motivation and self-efficacy. The *Aikido-ka* exercises these qualities when he is training and embeds them into his techniques. "ki" is also closely associated with words such as intention/purpose, decision and action (see Chapter 6.8).

Of course, the idea of 'flowing energy' can also be simply illustrated. Imagining that "ki" flows like water through our arms can supplement relaxation, because such a flow is only possible when our arms and joints are 'loosened up' i.e., relaxed. Similarly a full water hose is not slack. This image may also help to allow you to work up the correct feeling for a movement. To let your "ki" 'flow', means nothing less than being able to move naturally with the right balance between relaxation and tension.

1.1 Aikido Comparisons

One can get closer to the essence of Aikido by comparing it further with other sporting martial arts forms. This is not a question of trying to decide which martial arts form is 'better' or 'more effective', but rather - by making the differences clear - to show where the special features of Aikido lie and how its relationship measures up with the other sporting martial arts forms.

When an *Aikido-ka* tells someone that he is practicing Aikido, the first thing he is asked is what Aikido actually is. This is usually followed by the question: "Is it something like *Judo* or *Karate*?" Because other forms of martial arts are better known about than Aikido, those coming into contact with Aikido or hearing about it for the first time often try to sort it in their minds into a system known already to them.

Compared with Aikido and its further spread around the world, the greater knowledge of other sporting forms of the martial arts can be attributed to the fact that there is no competitive form of Aikido. Accordingly, no championships are carried out and also Aikido is not an Olympic sport and therefore not talked about much in the media. Besides this, in Aikido (at first sight) there are no sensational techniques to draw wide audiences (compare the 'breaking' techniques in *Karate* or *Taekwondo*).

Western forms of martial arts, such as boxing, wrestling or fencing, distinguish themselves from the origins of the Asian martial arts that are strongly linked to philosophical traditions and specific spiritual attitudes. Although there are parallels in technique between the far-eastern and western sports in martial arts, e.g., between *Karate* and *Savate-Boxe Française*, or between *Ju-Jutsu* and the medieval self-defense methods, they are essentially not comparable. The original aim of the Asian *Budo* – in contrast to western fighting sports – is not (only) victory over the opponent, but (also) conquering oneself. This way, the actual sense of exercising for a long time is about reaching a level of self-realization in the course of exercise. By exercising to reach the external purpose, the exercise should lead onto the internal feeling. By practicing certain techniques, the attention is also to be directed inwards, thus making the automated overall cycle of a movement a mirror of the inner attitude.



Karsten Prause 4th dan aikikai and Bodo Roedel – Aikido demonstration during the summer course run by Christian Tissier in Exertal, Germany 2007.

Accordingly, it is more appropriate to describe far-Eastern methods as martial “arts” rather than martial “sports” – although both terms are frequently used as synonyms. When comparing Aikido with other far-Eastern martial arts, what becomes particularly apparent are the differences in technique.

Judo

Judo was developed from the relatively older *Ju-Jutsu* that dates back to the fighting methods of the Japanese Samurai. The word *Judo* is made up from ‘*ju*’ meaning ‘to yield’ and ‘*do*’ meaning ‘way’. Together they mean ‘way of softness’ or ‘way of yielding’. *Judo*, as practiced today, was created by Jigoro Kano (1860-1938) and it excluded all the injurious techniques in *Ju-Jutsu* and allowed the possibility of submitting during a fight. Today, *Judo* is the martial art best known about. *Judo* has been an Olympic event since 1964.

In *Judo* there are standing techniques but also a number of groundwork techniques done kneeling or lying down. The partner is brought under control by using throws, holds, strangling actions and levers. Differently to Aikido, *Judo* techniques generally require gripping one another’s jacket, thus making the attacks less dynamic. By having to grip the jacket, *Tori* and *Uke* are often in a position much closer to each other than in Aikido.

The development of *Ju-Jutsu* into *Judo* is an example of how a system has been changed into a method of internal work – ‘*do*’, while originally the only aim was to injure and kill – *jutsu*. The same development has occurred in the way the history of Aikido has come on. It was Morihei Ueshiba, the creator of Aikido, who transformed the *daito ryu aiki-jujitsu* techniques, that had the aim only of defeating the opponent as quickly as possible, into the comparatively softer techniques of the ‘*do*’ (see Chapter 9.4).

Ju-Jutsu

Ju-Jutsu, also known as *Ju-Jitsu*, *Jujitsu* or *Jiu-Jitsu*, is a collective name for Japanese martial art styles including unarmed and armed techniques. It evolved among the Samurai of feudal Japan as a method for defeating an armed and armored opponent with weapons. The word can be broken down into two parts. “*Ju*” is a concept. The idea behind this meaning of *Ju* is “to be gentle”, “to give away”, “to yield”, “to blend”, “to move out of harm’s way”. “*Jutsu*” is the principle or “the action” part of *Ju-Jutsu*. In Japanese this word means science or technique.

There are many variations of *Ju-Jutsu*, which leads to a diversity of approaches. The methods of combat may include striking (kicking and punching), throwing (body

throws, unbalance throws) and restraining (pinning, strangulating, grappling, wrestling). Defense tactics include blocking, evading, off-balancing, blending and escaping. In addition, many schools teach the use of weapons. Modern *Ju-Jutsu* traditions were founded at the end of the 19th Century, when more than 2000 schools of *Ju-Jutsu* existed in Japan. Over time *Ju-Jutsu* has been embraced by law enforcement officials worldwide and continues to be the foundation for many specialized systems used by police.

There are many forms of sport *Ju-Jutsu*. One of the most common is mixed-style competitions, where competitors apply a variety of strikes, throws, and holds to score points. There are also *kata* competitions, where competitors of the same style perform techniques and are judged on their performance. Freestyle competitions also exist, where competitors take turns attacking each other, and the defender is judged on performance.

Karate

Karate-do ('*te*' = hand, '*kara*' = empty giving – "way of the empty hand") can be traced back over centuries of history. The Japanese styles of Karate were created on Okinawa – a group of islands lying to the south of Japan. The most common form of *Karate* today, is the style of *Shotokan Karate* that was created by the founder of modern *Karate*, Gishin Funakoshi. The IOC (International Olympic Committee) Congress recognizes *Karate* as an Olympic sport.

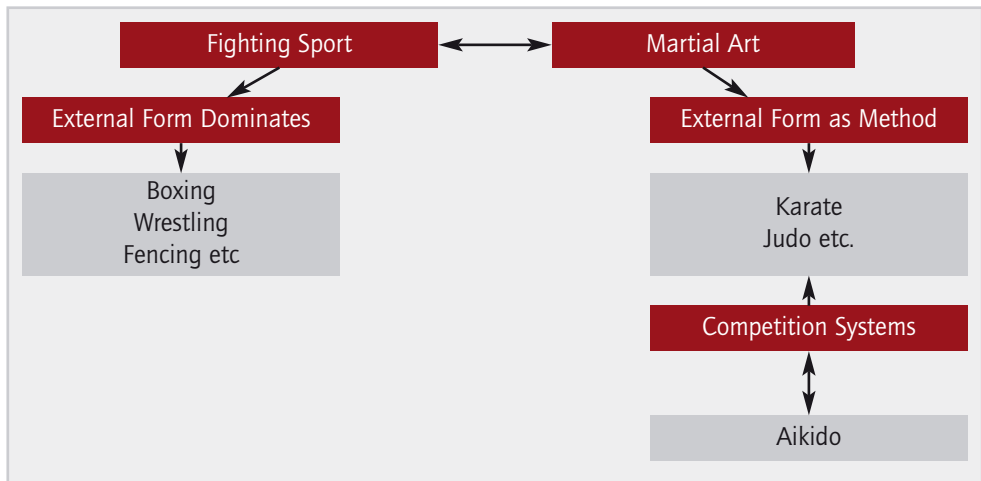
In *Karate*, the fists, edges of the hands, elbows, underarms, feet and knees are predominantly used. Both attack and defense techniques are practiced. In contrast to Aikido, in *Karate*, movements are made almost always in a straight line i.e., direct movements. Partners do not move harmoniously together, but rather try to get through to the opponent in a contest as quickly as possible. In *Shotokan Karate* competitions, punches and kicks are only intimated so that no actual strike is achieved – this would even constitute an offence if done. However, there are styles of *Karate* in which full body contact is used e.g., *Kyokushinkai Karate*.

Taekwondo

Taekwondo is a Korean system of self-defense that has developed on its own over many hundreds of years. In Korea, *Taekwondo* is not counted, however, as a martial art but rather as a type of sport. The term *Taekwondo* is made up of the elements '*tae*' = foot, '*kwon*' = fist and '*do*' = way. Translated, *Taekwondo* means "the art of fighting with the feet and hands". *Taekwondo* has been an Olympic sport since 2000.

In *Taekwondo*, in particular, you use the hands, fingers, fists, knuckles, elbows, knees, feet and head to punch, kick or ram with. Besides mastering the movement sequences and freestyle forms, you also have the 'breaking test', just like in *Karate*. In contrast to other martial arts, in *Taekwondo* the foot techniques are dominant. A fundamental difference to Shotokan *Karate* is furthermore that there are both semi-contact and full body contact fights that can lead to a knockout situation.

Putting these considerations into perspective, the following diagram will appear:



Of course, this form of exact diagram only serves as an aid to make it clear where Aikido has its place. As muted already at the beginning, fighting sports contain elements of the martial arts while, vice versa, martial arts necessarily include elements of sports. Of course, in the martial arts of competitive *Karate* and *Judo* systems, laid down forms – the *kata* – are often practiced outside the contest situation.

Further 'classical' martial arts forms are:

- *Kendo* – a fencing art using a sword made from bamboo (*shinai*) and stemming from Japan – ('*ken*' = sword)
- *Kyudo* – the way of archery
- *Iaido* – the art of drawing a sword

1.2 The Basic Premises in this Book

In the first chapter we showed some possibilities how one can understand the subject of Aikido better. In the following passages we will continue with a list of the premises valid for this book. The premises of "**Aikido – The Basics**" are oriented on the worldwide mainstream of Aikido. The mainstream is as found in its institutionally historic form under the worldwide umbrella foundation *aiki-kai* and is along the lines of the creator of Aikido – *o-sensei* Morihei Ueshiba.

- Aikido is a martial art and is based on the logical form of the martial arts. Aikido is not a fighting sport (even though it contains sporting elements) i.e., the result of the actions does not count (*'jutsu'*). It is rather more to do with the way the result was achieved (*'do'*).
- The primary aim is not the application of the Aikido techniques in 'realistic' situations, however, within the sense of a martial art, it is the real functionality of the Aikido techniques that is taken into account. This means that from at least the perspective of the *Aikido-ka*, he should be able to execute his techniques also with a non-*Aikido-ka*. Techniques that do not contain this element of realism are seen as exercises.
- The Aikido techniques are based on standardized principles (see Chapter 6). Conversely, this means that the techniques only function when the principles are observed.
- The use of the modern didactic method of teaching Aikido makes it understandable by everyone (see Chapter 7). This then offers the possibility of a life-long learning process with lots of opportunities for development.
- Aikido ranges between the 'ancient' and the 'modern' and is being continually developed further. However, the 'hard core' of Aikido is firmly manifested in its basic techniques.
- The key to understanding Aikido lies in exercise and training.
- The Aikido techniques count at the same time as a method for the 'mental work' to be done by the *Aikido-ka*. As a result, there is not only a form of Aikido that is oriented round the technique, but contrary to this also a form of Aikido where the mental work comes to the fore. Moreover, without the correct technique there can be no Aikido! The technique and the mental work are the two sides of a coin.



Christian Tissier and Bodo Roedel – kokyū nage

1.3 Aikido Exercise Forms

In Aikido there are various forms of exercises that are dependent on which subject is to be learned. These exercise forms are independent from the particular technique. In the *tachi waza* techniques both Uke and Tori are in the standing position. In the *hanmi handachi waza* techniques Tori is kneeling (see Chapter 2.9) and is attacked by Uke from a standing position. Uke's aim is then to prevent Tori from standing up. If Tori and Uke are exercising *suwari waza* then this means that both do this from a kneeling position.

Ju no geiko indicates a soft form of practicing where Uke rides with the movement offering no resistance – this form is mainly about learning the technique. On the other hand *go no keiko* indicates a form of practice carried out firmly and with force i.e., Tori must already be able to execute the technique to be practiced well.

If Uke attacks Tori always with the same form, and the latter reacts freely with various different techniques each time, then we speak about *jijyu waza*. The term *randori* indicates that Uke uses a free attack and Tori reacts with different techniques.

Randori also indicates defense against a number of 'Uke' who usually attack with *ryo kata dori* (see Page 278).

The term *kokyu-ho* indicates exercises that explicitly illustrate the principle of communicative exchange (see Chapter 6.3). They are not techniques (*waza*) but are exercises (*ho*).

Weapons in Aikido

Tori can be attacked by Uke holding a weapon. In *tanto dori*, Uke attacks with a knife and therefore Tori's aim is to defend against the attack and take the knife away from Uke (see Chapter 5.5). In *tachi-dori*, Uke attacks with a (wooden) sword and using a technique Tori takes it away from him. *Jo dori* indicates that Uke attacks with a stick (staff) and Tori takes it away from him. Conversely, in *jo nage waza*, Tori is holding a stick and Uke attacks him by grabbing hold of the *jo* – that he then uses to defend himself.

Besides these, there are Aikido exercises in which Uke as well as Tori have either a sword or a stick.

Kumi jo indicates partners exercising with the stick – *kumi tachi* is partners exercising with a sword.

Uke and Tori go on to practice laid down sequences of movements – so-called *kata* – that would be far too dangerous to use in free training. Similar to the Aikido exercises without weapons, the level of intensity in the attack and in defense increases according to the caliber of the *Aikido-ka*.

Practicing with weapons in Aikido makes sense as follows: For one, the creator of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba learned to use various weapon techniques himself including exercises with the sword, stick, lance etc. So, exercises with the stick and the sword are part of the historical heart of Aikido.

However, the following aspects are possibly more interesting: Practicing with weapons serves to let the *Aikido-ka* understand several aspects. In Aikido, with or without weapons, the movements of the feet are the same or very similar. The same applies to the hand movements. Additionally, many Aikido techniques without weapons are executed with the feeling of a cutting or stabbing movement (not pulling or pushing) and this is identical to the work with the sword.

Besides, one gets to understand the distance between Uke and Tori better by practicing with the sword, because the weapon automatically determines this. In part, working with a weapon is eventually direct and rapid – practicing using the *jo* or *bokken* therefore helps to develop the martial arts character of Aikido further.



Christian Tissier and Bodo Roedel – 2007 – practicing using the wooden sword – bokken

Further Reading:

"The Book of Five Rings" by Miyamoto Musashi circa 1645 – Translated by various



"A good hockey player plays where the puck is. A great hockey player plays where the puck is going to be."

Wayne Gretzky



2 Foot Movements

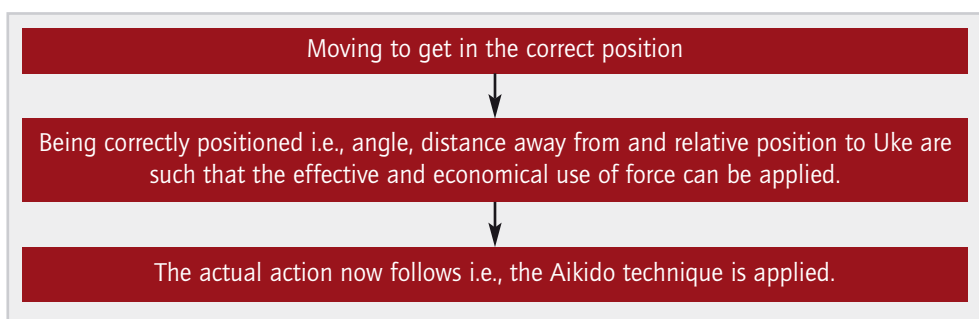
- What do you begin doing in Aikido?
- How do you move your feet in Aikido?
- What do the foot movements look like?

As a martial art, Aikido is an art of moving. This means that correct and sure foot movements in Aikido are particularly important in order to be able to execute the techniques. Invariably, therefore, the foot movements take priority over hand movements. When the *Aikido-ka* has managed to master the foot movements, then he can equally easily learn the hand and arm movements – in short – the hand movements always follow the foot movements and not vice versa.

We will, therefore, introduce all the basic foot movements used in Aikido in this chapter. Because Aikido is based on standardized principles, there are a series of foot movements that always crop up. If one has understood these, then just beginners in Aikido can discover the basic techniques more easily. Each foot movement is covered in this chapter using examples of the movement to make them clear. The examples of the movements are, on the other hand, only part movements of the Aikido techniques.

Because the positions of the feet in Aikido are identical to the positions with the sword (see Chapter 2.10), three of the positions with the sword (amongst others) serve as illustration to allow a better understanding of the foot movements.

The foot movements in Aikido always follow a prioritized pattern that is the same for all Aikido basic techniques:



Thus, Tori just doesn't simply move, he always moves with the aim of being in a better position than before (see the execution along the principle of simple movements in Chapter 6.6).

2.1 kamae



We first have a closer look at the basic position – the on guard position – the Japanese term for this is *kamae*. There is no specific on guard position in Aikido. The feet are simply placed one behind the other along a straight line. The rear foot is pointing in the forward direction, just like normal walking. The picture shows the position from the front.



The on guard position in Aikido as seen from the side.

When one starts Aikido, it is very important to learn to adopt a stable and low down stance. At the beginning, this means that you have to train your leg muscles for the specific Aikido stresses. On this, note that the feet are behind each other at a greater distance apart than they would be normally.