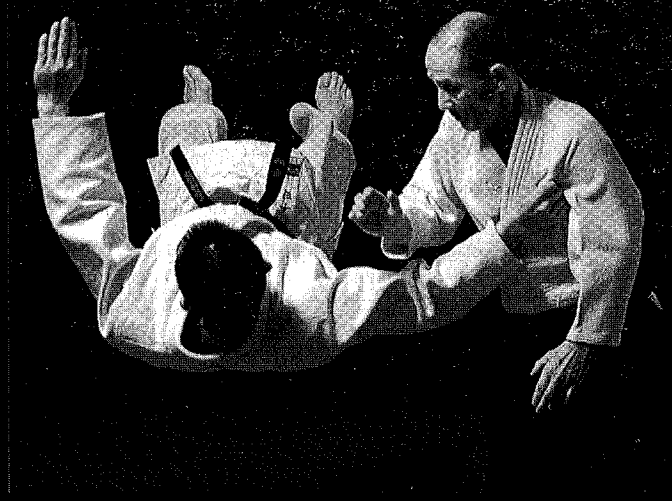

I truly feel that this translation of Shioda Kancho's book is a great success. Throughout the translation, we are provided with a personal and direct experience with Kancho himself – as though he were standing and moving right there in front of us. This is the true value of this work – it is not merely a translation.

From the Forward by
Inoue Kyoichi, Dojo-cho
Aikido Yoshinkan Hombu Dojo

The publication of "Aikido Shugyo" in the English language is a watershed event for aikido enthusiasts everywhere. Gozo Shioda, one of the most talented students of the art's founder Morihei Ueshiba, is the author of this fascinating tome that recounts his career and philosophy as an aikido teacher. Besides describing the events of his exciting life as an early pupil of Ueshiba in the 1930s and his wartime and postwar experiences, Shioda offers a host of insights into the psychology of the fighting arts and survival in a world of conflict.

This translation by two advanced practitioners of Yoshinkan Aikido is first-rate and this book will be an essential addition to the collection of any martial arts practitioner.

Stanley Pranin
Editor, Aikido Journal

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AIKIDO SHUGYO

HARMONY IN CONFRONTATION

GOZO SHIODA

TRANSLATED BY

JACQUES PAYET &
CHRISTOPHER JOHNSTON

AIKIDO SHUGYO

GOZO SHIODA

dokan

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By Gozo Shioda

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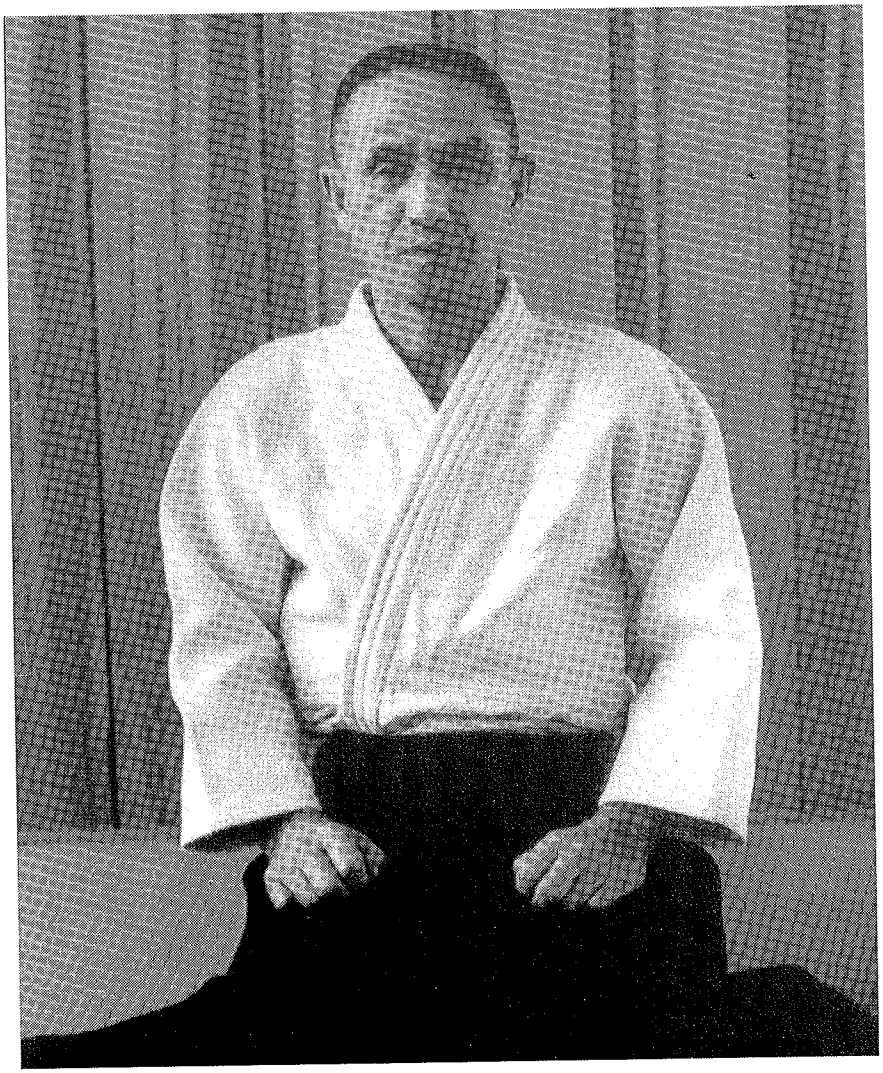

Shioda Gozo (1915-1994)
Founder of Yoshinkan Aikido

DEDICATION

We would like to dedicate this translation to

Shioda Gozo Sensei
who is an inspiration and an icon to us all

and

Kimeda Takeshi Sensei
who has given his life's energy to the propagation
of Shioda Gozo's vision and Yoshinkan Aikido.

Jacques Payet and
Christopher Johnston

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to offer our gratitude to all the people who assisted us in the realization of this project.

In particular, our thanks go to Shioda Yasuhisa Sensei and the Shioda family, and to Mr. Jiromaru Akio for their complete support.

We offer thanks as well to Inoue Kyoichi Sensei, Chida Tsutomu Sensei and the Yoshinkan Honbu staff for their kind advice.

We would also like to thank Kimeda Takeshi Sensei for his continuous support and encouragement.

Special acknowledgement must also be given to Yamamoto Hiroko Sensei, her husband Yamamoto Taneshiro and Ms. Donna Maloney for editing and reviewing the final English manuscript. Finally, Jacques Payet would like to acknowledge Geordan Reynolds and his family for their financial and moral support while preparing this project in California.

Jacques Payet and
Christopher Johnston

From The Editor of the Japanese Edition

The contents of this book, as dictated by Shioda Gozo Sensei in interviews, were arranged and composed by the editor. Supplemental sections were added to particularly difficult passages in order to aid the reader's understanding. Although under the editorial supervision of Shioda Sensei, please understand that the composition of this book was based on the editor's interpretation. Furthermore, on the occasion of the publication of this book, I received significant co-operation from Ueshiba Kisshomaru Doshu of the Aikikai Foundation, as well as Akazawa Zensaburo and Yonekawa Shigemi, both of whom trained diligently with Shioda Sensei at the Ueshiba Dojo before the war. I formally offer each of you my heartfelt thanks.

Jiromaru Akio
Editor

FROM THE TRANSLATORS

Throughout the translation of this book we have made every effort to present the original text in direct translation. We have been extremely cautious not to offer our interpretation but to stay true to the author's own words. And yet, invariably, certain turns of phrase demanded that we exercise some leeway. When such a situation was encountered, we opted to translate the spirit of the original text in order to maintain its intent.

Footnotes throughout this book are marked as either *Editor's Notes* or *Translator's Notes*. Those marked as *Editor's Notes* refer to editorial footnotes found in the original Japanese version of the book. These have been translated directly. Those marked as *Translator's Notes* are our own and are offered primarily in an attempt to clarify terminology. Also, in most cases we have opted to give all names in their Japanese order; that is, surname first.

Shioda Gozo Sensei passed away July 17, 1994, 3 years after the original publication of this book in Japanese. As a result, since we have chosen to remain faithful to the original text and have not modified any of its contents in translation, the reader may be aware of some inconsistencies relative to the time frames discussed.

J.P. and C.J.
March 2002

行住座臥
一切の事勢
これ最善の道場

Wherever you are and whatever you are doing . . .
Nothing can compare to this.
This is the ultimate dojo.

Dogen
1200-1253

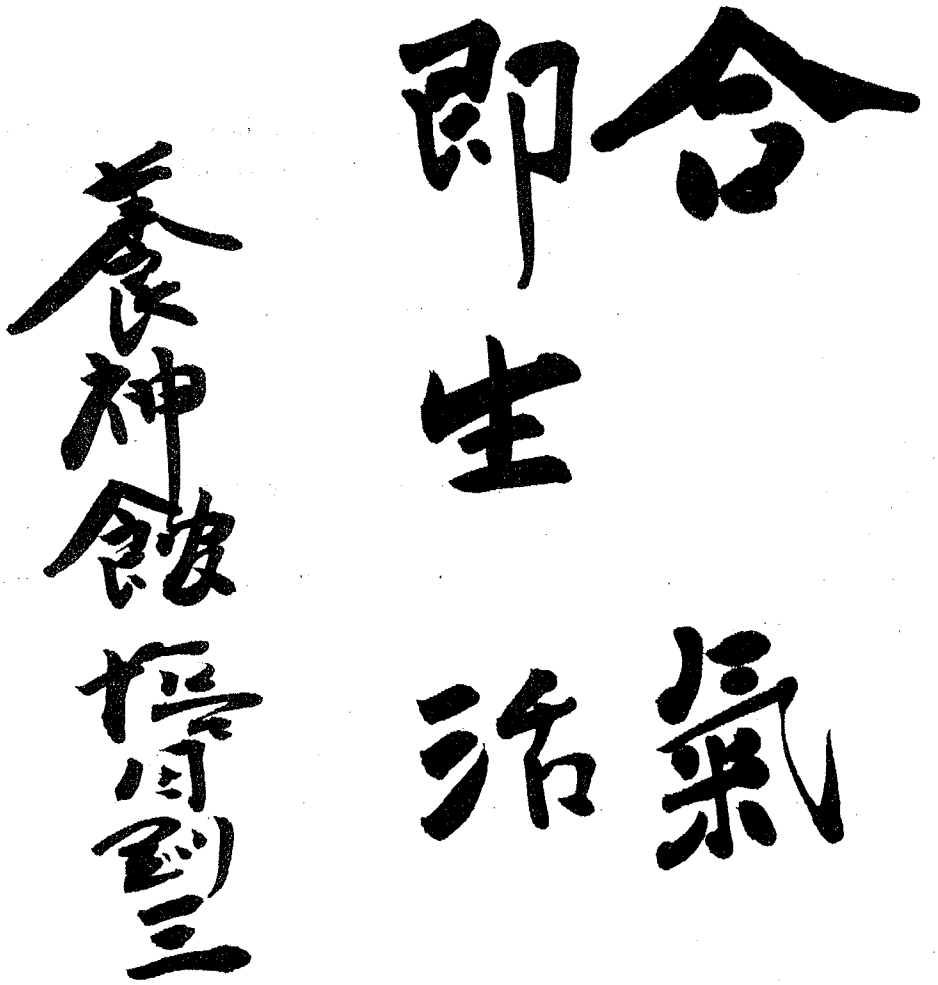
FORWARD

The translators, Mr. Jacques Payet and Mr. Christopher Johnston, remind me of the motto at the left which is from Dogen (1200-1253) and which Shioda Kancho held to very closely. Their own *shugyo* within the Yoshinkan has, of course, included their Aikido training, but even when there was a break they were reluctant to give up any spare moment and diligently focused on their Japanese language studies.

And now, I truly feel that this translation of Shioda Kancho's book is a great success. Throughout the translation, we are provided with a personal and direct experience with Kancho himself – as though he were standing and moving right there in front of us. This is the true value of this work – it is not merely a translation.

As you read these pages and gain an appreciation for Kancho Sensei's Aikido Shugyo, I urge you to also discover, flowing between the lines, those traces of Jacques Payet's and Christopher Johnston's own extraordinary *shugyo*.

Inoue Kyoichi, Dojo-cho
Aikido Yoshinkan Hombu Dojo
Tokyo, Japan



"Aiki soku seikatsu." Aikido and life are one.
Signed: Yoshinkan, Shioda Gozo

INTRODUCTION

After a party or social event, when in the intimate circle of his **uchideshi** (live-in students) and close friends, Shioda Sensei often enjoyed telling us many incredible stories of the old times when he himself was a student of Ueshiba Morihei Sensei. Years before the original Japanese version of this book was compiled, he shared with us many anecdotes of his extremely rich and adventurous life, giving us many invaluable insights into his personal training and philosophy.

However, if it were not for the work of the Japanese editor, Mr. Jiromaru Akio, many Aikido students and indeed the general public would never have had access to such a treasury of information. When I read Aikido Shugyo for the first time in its Japanese version in 1991, I knew that it was my mission to translate it into English. With the help and support of the Yoshinkan Honbu dojo staff, I started a hand-written English translation in early 1992. Unfortunately this first manuscript could not be edited before Shioda Sensei's death, but stayed in the kitchen of the dojo so that any Westerner could have access to it.

In 1996, Mr. Christopher Johnston, a student of Kimeda Sensei in Canada, printed a very accurate and excellent new translation of Aikido Shugyo as a private collection. Finally, in 2001 Mr. Johnston and I decided to put our efforts together and publish the definitive version of Shioda Gozo Sensei's

book, Aikido Shugyo. I am sure that anyone interested in traditional martial arts, and Aikido students in particular, will read this book with great excitement and will be highly inspired.

There is probably no exact translation of the Japanese word **shugyo**. I heard it for the first time in 1980 when I joined the old Koganei Honbu dojo in Tokyo, Japan, as an uchideshi of Kancho Shioda Gozo. Sensei requested that his uchideshi use any moment and any activity in the dojo to perform their personal shugyo. Shugyo may be explained as 'ascetic training', constant training in order to unite body, mind and heart. It involves physical training – the endless repetition of techniques six hours a day five or six days a week, which aims to extend our physical limits. It also involves mind training – the diligent practice of awareness, sensitivity and intuition. This includes learning how to open doors for our teacher, when to flash the light or serve the tea at exactly the right moment in perfect timing, how to guess and act before Sensei has to ask us to do something. Shugyo also encompasses a training of the heart – how to help our teacher take his bath or put on his clothes. Shugyo requires that we serve our teacher in total obedience so as to suppress our own ego, thus learning true humility and purity. As uchideshi, this total commitment was our shugyo.

It is very difficult to perform shugyo without the proper surroundings. Therefore, a young student wishing to follow this path has no choice but to actually live in a traditional dojo. In this way, the student can fully experience the total commitment required.

Shugyo involves a set of general patterns which serve as rituals to prepare the mind. For example, we learned to get up early and perform every small daily routine as if our lives depended on it. We felt that nothing was more important than cleaning the dojo, gathering garbage or serving tea to our senior. We also learned to rid ourselves of our fears; for instance, by focusing on nothing else but running as fast as we could each time the very scary instructor was about to demonstrate a technique. Gradually, we learned how to act faster and faster, as if our lives were in danger.

Throughout this style of training, a young uchideshi was never allowed to sit down between classes and had to stand alert and ready to run each time Sensei would go to the bathroom. He would compete with three or four of his co-disciples and move faster than everyone else to accompany Sensei. He would also answer the phone before the end of the second ring and sometimes even before the second ring was heard at all! Little by little, these constantly repeated but invisible actions would mould and prepare the body, the mind and the heart for a deeper and more personal voyage.

Imperceptibly, the uchideshi's technique, timing, attitude – indeed, his entire being – would be influenced. Through time, he would become a better person; one who is more aware of his weak points, more courageous and more honest.

As such, shugyo is a universal and traditional path of constant self-improvement through a body-to-body and heart-to-heart experience. It is a wonderful way to enhance the human spirit through total commitment and the

polishing of the body, the mind and the heart. Ultimately, shugyo is a personal and spiritual journey through which your Aikido becomes your life.

In this way, Shioda Gozo Sensei has built a terribly efficient model for the development of the true spirit and the realization of Aikido as a form of Budo. And so we must always bear in mind that if we only teach and train the technical aspects of the art on the mat, then Aikido becomes merely a sport, a set of physical exercise or a dance – it loses its soul.

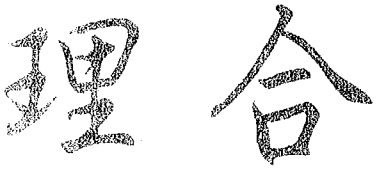
Kancho Sensei has past away now, and the old Koganei dojo has been destroyed. But even so, thanks to his teachings, we know what should be done to preserve the true spirit of Yoshinkan Aikido. This book provides one way for those who never had the chance to train under Shioda Sensei to gain insight into his legacy. It is also an homage to my teacher to whom I promised one day to translate his work.

Jacques Payet

AIKIDO SHUGYO

HARMONY IN CONFRONTATION

Fundamental Principles



Misunderstandings About Aikido

It seems there are many people who have doubts about Aikido's strength as a martial art. They seem to wonder: "Aikido has no tournaments, it does not develop physical strength, and it relies solely on the practice of pre-arranged forms. Will it *really* be effective?" There are also people who harbour doubts about the techniques themselves. "There is no way to unbalance someone so completely and throw them *that* easily," they will say. "It only works because

the attackers are throwing themselves down deliberately." This book will attempt to answer questions about Aikido and make it clear that these are doubts which have unfortunately distorted Aikido's reputation. Of course, it is difficult to understand the techniques of Aikido simply by watching them. In Judo, by contrast, there are many forceful techniques, and even if you are just watching you can get a sense of the power in the techniques. In Karate as well, surely there is no one among us who cannot imagine the pain that a thrusting kick can cause. In comparison, Aikido clearly has very few attacking movements and the uninitiated will find it difficult to comprehend. After watching Aikido they will say to themselves: "I can't figure it out. I don't know how it works."

How then can someone possibly reach any sort of understanding about Aikido? To achieve this, the most important thing is to actually try it yourself. Then there will be no need to convince those who think Aikido is fake to agree to its effectiveness. I urge you, if you have any interest in Aikido whatsoever, do not hesitate to try it. You will quickly understand the way the techniques work as well as what happens when the techniques are performed on you.

Just recently, for example, an uncommonly large man came to my dojo to observe a class. You could tell at a glance that he had trained in some sort of **budo**[1] or other fighting art. On that particular day we were conducting a special training session for black belt students. He looked on with skepticism

[1] The term **budo** means "martial way" and is a general term that is used to refer to the modern martial arts of Japan. [Translator's note.]

as I began throwing the black belt students around the mat. However, after watching for a while, and probably because he was involved in some sort of martial art, he came to realize that those who were being thrown had truly had their balance broken. He left my dojo that day with a completely different view – he had been thoroughly impressed by Aikido's effectiveness.

We heard later that this man, let's call him Mr. A, was in fact the coach of a certain university's wrestling club. Even though he was over 30 years old, he also trained in **Sambo** (a grappling art of the Soviet Union which resembles Judo) and you could see that he was quite a strong man. From that first encounter, Mr. A quickly became a regular observer at my dojo, watching the practices with wide-eyed intensity, constantly nodding his head as if in agreement and taking notes. Somehow he seemed to have become completely captivated by Aikido. In no time at all Mr. A enrolled as a student. It was a heartwarming sight to see him, his huge frame wrapped in his training uniform, throwing himself single-mindedly into practising the basic techniques in a beginner's class with girls and senior citizens. Needless to say, Mr. A became more and more enthusiastic with each training session. In the end, he even started video-taping the practices! His goal was to advance quickly to the senior level and to participate in the special practice sessions that he had originally observed with skepticism.

Let Me Take Your Hand

This same Mr. A once came to me with an apprehensive, yet respectful, look on his face and said, "**Kancho**[2] Sensei, I am extremely impressed with your technique. However, I haven't really been able to take hold of your hand even once. I wonder if the techniques would still work if you let me take your hand just once."

By asking me whether he might grab my hand, he was in effect asking me to apply a technique on him. Even though he had become consumed with Aikido, Mr. A probably still harboured some slight doubt about its effectiveness. I am sure that he came to me in order to allay these doubts. As I stood up from my chair and offered him my left hand, I said to him: "It's fine. Do as you please."

With the utmost respect and humility he said, "Excuse me," and took my left wrist with both of his hands. However, as you might expect, he maintained a somewhat reserved attitude and took my hand rather gently.

"Don't hold back. Grab my wrist firmly," I told him. He responded decisively, "Osu!"

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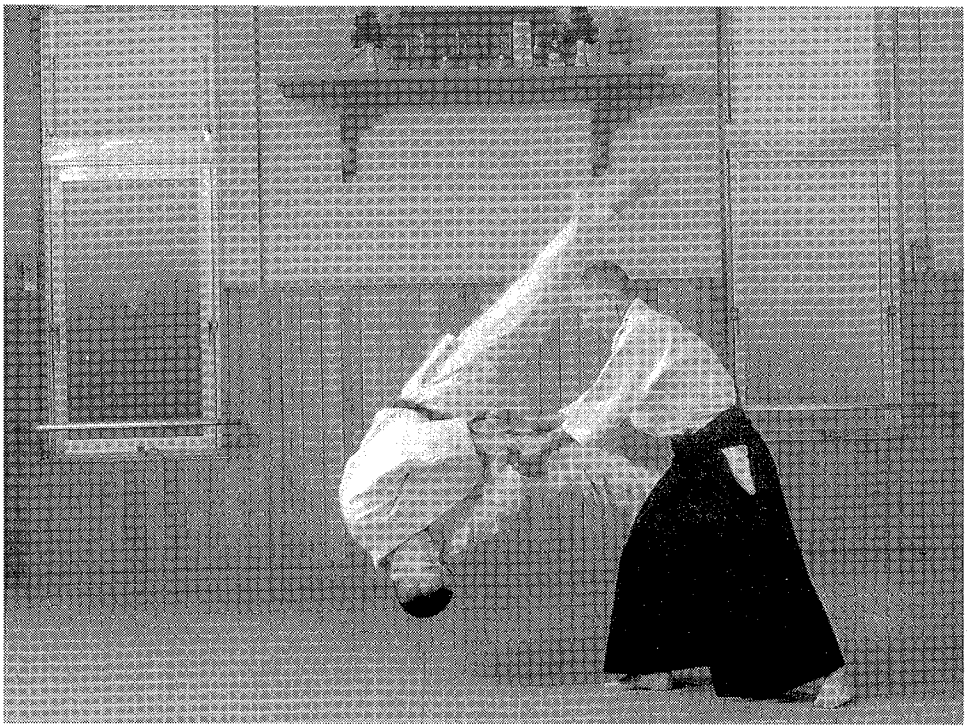
[2] The title **Kancho** literally means "director" and is reserved for the one person who holds the highest position within the group's chain of command. [Translator's note.]



Because of my urging, Mr. A put much more strength into his grip. However, I could see that he was still holding back. From my point of view though, if he used all of his power, doing a technique would be easier. So I prodded him on some more.

"What? Is this the best you can do?" I asked him. "Even though you're so big, you really aren't that strong are you?"

Finally, Mr. A put all of his strength into his grip. As you can imagine, being such a large man his grip was like a vice. But just at the instant that he applied his great strength, I quickly turned my wrist over. Mr. A's huge frame, at 180 centimetres and more than 100 kilograms, did a complete revolution and he bore the full brunt of his own extraordinary strength. He did a full somersault and collapsed right there on the floor of my office.

Mr. A was bewildered. "Amazing. Amazing," he said in a surprised voice.

With this, even the slightest hint of doubt that Mr. A had in his heart had completely vanished. As for my part, I am overwhelmed when I think that there are people like him who are so passionately devoted to Aikido. I hope that they accomplish all that they set out to do. If you have any interest in Aikido or if you have any doubts, you should not hesitate to try it, even if you are not as extremely devoted as Mr. A, because then you will be able to fully experience the thrill and wonder of Aikido.

Aikido Is The Study of Fundamental Principles

Personally, I feel that Aikido is the way of **shugyo**[3]. Of course, there is the physical training through which we become stronger. But besides that, I think that by taking up Aikido one is also taking up spiritual training for life. Accordingly, there are practice methods that are suited to each individual but becoming physically strong is not necessarily the main goal of this training. Therefore, I don't think that discussions about such things as physical strength really have any meaning in Aikido. When we think of Aikido as a martial art, however, one thing can be stated categorically; that is, rather than relying on strength or anything else, Aikido conforms to certain fundamental principles. If you follow these principles of Aikido, you will be able to defend yourself.

Training in Aikido will not give you arms as thick as logs, nor will it give you a body like a suit of armour that can take any kind of blow. However, if your movements and your use of power follow the fundamental principles of

[3] The term **shugyo** really has no single equivalent in English. It implies intensive and concentrated training and dedication, not unlike the training one would expect to find among monks in a Zen temple, for example. In fact, the term itself is borrowed from the religious world where it refers to a situation in which the trainee has given himself over completely to his teacher. True shugyo means that the student is actually living with the teacher and is undergoing constant daily training and studying. While it is normally translated as "training", shugyo embodies much more than the usual idea of going to train two or three times per week. It should be thought of as an immersion into something with all of one's being. [Translator's note.]

Aikido, you will be able to control an opponent who is physically stronger than yourself.

It is because of my training in Aikido that I have been able to live such a long life. I have endured the turbulence of the Second World War and encountered some extremely difficult situations and somehow I have managed to survive until this day. This too, I feel, is a gift I received from my Aikido training. At times, I was able to defend myself because of the fundamental principles found in Aikido. This logical design of the techniques, what we might call their underlying foundation, has from ancient times been called **riai**[4] in the martial arts. If you move your body in conformity with riai, then it really isn't necessary to have a lot of strength and you will be able to control your opponent quite safely. In short, it can be said that Aikido training is intended to make our bodies move in conformity with riai.

However, there is something here that should not be misunderstood. Just because one has learned the basic techniques doesn't mean that the riai has been achieved or understood. In fact, discussions such as, "**kotegaeshi**[5] works if you do it this way" or "**nikajo**[6] is painful when you do it this way," though invariably of interest to the students, really are unimportant. Of course, these

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[4] **Riai** is another term which really has no English equivalent. It refers to the logical reason for the effectiveness of a technique. It is the underlying principle upon which the design of the technique is based. Throughout the text we have translated it as "fundamental principle(s)". [Translator's note.]

[5] "Outward Wrist Twist". [Translator's note.]

[6] "Second Control". [Translator's note.]

are skills that students must naturally acquire but it is meaningless to judge Aikido's effectiveness by such standards. It's not how to use each technique that is important. Rather, the key is to discover the riai that exists within the techniques. Unless this is understood, things will turn out badly in a desperate situation and we'll say things like, "He didn't react in the same way people do during practice, so my technique didn't work." As a result, we will give the impression that Aikido is ineffective. Therefore, knowing the individual techniques of Aikido is not what leads us to understand the essence of Aikido. This comes only when we fully understand the riai.

If our movements are consistent with riai, then our dependence on individual techniques will naturally disappear. And with that gone, no matter what movements we encounter in an opponent, we will be able to adapt and deal with them.

When one comes to this conclusion, they can then begin to see the real value of Aikido as a martial art, as budo. But how will the riai of Aikido appear when you find yourself in a situation where you must defend yourself? Let me illustrate this with a simple example.

THE SHINJUKU BRAWL INCIDENT

Sometime around 1935 while I was still training at the **Ueshiba Dojo**[7], I was walking in Shinjuku one evening with my **kohai**[8], Mr. T. In those days Shinjuku was a place where racketeers and hooligans hung out, so it was a rather intimidating place. Now, while I wouldn't want it to be widely known, the reason we were in such an unsavoury place was to find someone on whom to test our skills. Remember that I was a young man in my early twenties with a hot-blooded temper. I also had some understanding of Aikido and I wanted to find out just how much I was capable of doing with it. This was the only way to really test ourselves. For young people with this goal, Shinjuku was the ideal setting.

As I write this, it seems to me that I must appear to have been rough and violent but in those days at the Ueshiba Dojo this type of behaviour wasn't so

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[7] The founder of Aikido, Ueshiba Morihei, established a dojo in Kawamatsu-cho in Tokyo's Shinjuku Ward in 1931. It was formally called the Kobukan Dojo. Because of its intense practice, it was referred to as the Ushigome Dojo of Hell (Ushigome is an area of Shinjuku [Translator's note.]). With this as a base, Ueshiba's guidance and leadership reached as far as Osaka, Kyoto, the military and the police, and Manchuria. Later, the Kobukai, a non-profit corporation, was established with Admiral Takeshita Isamu as chairman. This became the predecessor of what is today the Aikikai. [Editor's note.]

[8] The **sempai/kohai** (senior-junior) relationship is one that is ubiquitous throughout Japan and is based primarily upon date of entry into an organization. The more experienced sempai offers guidance and friendship to the kohai who in turn offers respect and personal loyalty. [Translator's note.]

unusual. Because Aikido has no competitive matches, we honestly couldn't tell just how strong we were becoming even with our intensive daily training sessions. So this is why, despite Ueshiba Sensei prohibiting us from testing ourselves like this, everyone would go out to these busy areas for a little experimentation and research.

Mr. Yukawa, a fellow student who was senior to me and who has since passed away, used to love this kind of testing. He had a significant influence on me. There were also junior students who liked this sort of activity. One of them would return to the dojo after a fight and say something like, "I was defeated today!" and proceed to show us his wounds. Greatly amused by this, I would prod him to "Try again!" and he would cheerfully go out looking for a fight the very next evening.

My kohai, Mr. T, who was also keen on this sort of "street training", always accompanied me when I went to Shinjuku, acting as my advanced guard. On this particular occasion, he discovered a group of **yakuza**[9] who had gathered together. "Sempai, there are some guys who look pretty cocky," he whispered to me with bright fiery eyes. "I'll go and bump into them and we'll start a fight!"

In all honesty, I too was excited so I slapped him on the back and said, "Go ahead!" He quickly marched right up to the group of yakuza and suddenly

[9] The **yakuza** are Japan's professional gangsters. [Translator's note.]

bumped his shoulder into one of them. "What's this?" the yakuza demanded angrily. Thinking this would be the start of the fight, I squared off and got ready. But then something unexpected happened. Attracted by his angry voice, what looked like henchmen from the same gang appeared out of the surrounding alleys. Shocked, Mr. T leapt back to where I was. That's when, I moved to the front.

I quickly realized there were more than 30 of them and only the two of us. On the one hand, I was petrified with the prospect of such a difficult fight, but I was also thinking, "This has become interesting."

Supported now by all of his henchmen, the angry yakuza opened his mouth and announced: "I'm so-and-so from XYZ gang. What's your name and which gang are you from?" I announced: "I'm not from any gang. I'm Shioda of **Aikijutsu**[10]."

This may seem like a scene from a gangster movie but in those days it was not unusual for a fight to start off this way. The yakuza today have no class, but in the old days as soon as they became yakuza they held duty and respect in high esteem. They wouldn't do anything so crass as to wave a dagger around without any warning.

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[10] The name Aikido was used after 1942. Before that it was called Kobukan Budo, Aikijutsu, Asahi Ryu, Aioi Ryu, Aiki Budo, and other such things. Subsequently, the names Tenshin Aikido and Takemusu Aikido were also used. Terms like these seem to follow the founder's development as a martial artist and to illustrate his concurrent religious development. [Editor's note.]

"What is this Aikijutsu?" he asked with a mocking smile. His ignorance about Aikijutsu was not surprising. Compared to Judo, which was made popular by its inclusion in the physical education curriculum in schools, Aikijutsu was unknown to many people. As well, it was being taught primarily to the police and the military, and for an ordinary person to enter the dojo it was necessary to have two sponsors. With such strict conditions, the public had limited opportunities to be exposed to Aikijutsu techniques.

For this reason, even the angry yakuza must have thought that I was nothing more than some kind of street performer[11]. On top of that, I am sure that he let his guard down when he saw how small I was.

The Reality Of Facing Multiple Opponents

At this point, every nerve in my body was focused on the fight ahead. When fighting a large group, the key is to bring down the strongest guy right away.

[11] After the Meiji Restoration, martial arts practitioners were often reduced to street performers in order to survive the push toward modernization. [Translator's note.]

So while I was announcing myself to the boss, I searched through the 30 gang members behind him for my target. Out of the corner of my eye I caught sight of one guy who impressed me right away. There was something different about his bearing. He had a strange composure about him, and I sensed that he was used to fighting. Also, whether it was his build or just the way he carried himself, it was easy to see he was in good physical condition. There was no mistake about it; he was probably the headman's bodyguard.

The formalities were over. The situation was touch-and-go and the tension had soared to a feverish pitch. The next moment would decide victory or defeat. As a single unit, the gang started to move toward us, but I was a step ahead of them and the first to move! In one breath, I jumped straight at the guy I had set my sights on and drove an **atemi**[12] punch into his stomach. With a groan, he crumpled to the ground.

"You bastard!" they all exclaimed. "Kill him!"

Yelling and screaming came from every direction as the rest of the gang turned and pounced on Mr. T and me – but by then, I had already gained control.

Before a fight you are always frightened. No matter how confident you think you are, you inevitably end up excited and nervous. However, once you've

[12] **Atemi** are attacks on the body's nerve centers (vital points) and are distinct from simple punches. [Translator's note.]

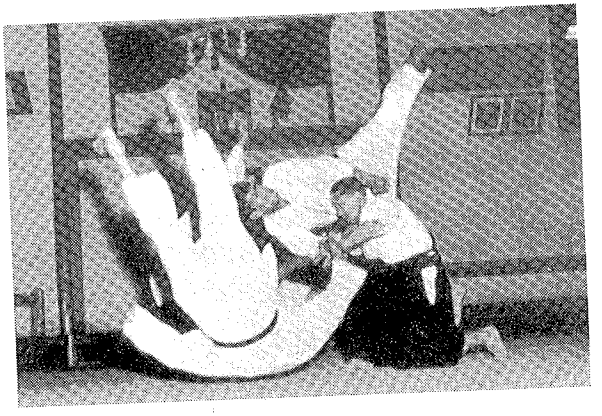
brought down the first man you quickly regain your composure. Then, the opponent's movements become easier to see.

The gang, on the other hand, was beginning to waver and lose confidence. In a group, everyone tends to rely on one person, who becomes the key to their fighting ability. Having focused on this one person, the whole group's spirit is united as one. When that individual is suddenly defeated, the key to the group's fighting ability and the foundation of its spirit are lost in the same instant. Disheartened, the group falls apart.

Under these conditions, the group no longer provokes fear. Moreover, because the feeling of terror is turned against them, they become agitated and lose their composure. These are the best kinds of opponents for Aikido. There is no need to wait for them to attack. Instead, I would go after them myself, confusing them and causing them to rush wildly at me. Then, I would turn my body just slightly forcing one of them to lose his balance or a couple of them to bump into each other, thus pitting them against one another and causing their own downfall. I would then drive atemi punches into the others, one after another. In this way, Mr. T and I created so much chaos that we were able to finish off all 30 gang members.

I must point out that this episode reflects the extreme impatience of youth. At the time, I was still in the middle of my training and it was well before I understood the true meaning of Aikido. But even though my skills were

limited, I feel that these situations gave me some understanding about how to use Aikido in an actual fight.



More than likely, there are some people who have a completely different impression of Aikido than the image I've just presented. So now I will try to explain the important part riai played in the above episode.

Atemi are 70% of a Real Fight

Many of you are likely surprised at how often I use atemi. This is only natural since when we talk about Aikido, everyone is caught up in images of wrist grasps and flashy throws. However, **Ueshiba Morihei Sensei**[13] himself, who was my master at one point, expressed himself in the following manner. He said, "In a real fight, Aikido is 70 percent atemi and 30 percent throwing." Based on my own experience, I can say that this is precisely the case.

"If that is so," you might ask, "what is the use of joint techniques?" Well, if you are being hassled by a drunkard for example, using joint techniques to control the other person may well be the best route. But in a life or death situation, or when you are engaged with multiple opponents, you cannot defend yourself without atemi and instantaneous throws because victory or defeat comes in a split second. In other words, you might say that the essence of Aikido is revealed in this type of intense fighting.

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[13] **Ueshiba Morihei** was the founder of Aikido. He was born in the city of Tanabe in Wakayama Prefecture in 1883. When he was young, he studied both Tenjin Shinyo Ryu Jujutsu and Yagyu Shingan Ryu Jujutsu. When he was involved in the settling of Hokkaido he met Takeda Sokaku and became a student of Daito Ryu Aikijujutsu. Later, becoming an enthusiastic adherent of the Omoto Kyo religion, he blended his religious views with his martial arts and created Aikido. He died in 1969 at the age of 86. He is held in high esteem as an extraordinary master of the modern age. [Editor's note.]

In Aikido, atemi is not limited to punching or kicking. Any part of the body can become a weapon for executing atemi. Some of you may have seen me in demonstrations use my back to repel an opponent rushing at me, or my shoulder to send my opponent flying as we pass each other. The reason these techniques work is that the contact point in itself becomes the atemi.

These techniques are made possible by entering into the middle of the attack rather than by avoiding the opponent's attack and then counterattacking. However, it is not good enough to simply throw your body at random against

the opponent. Your entire body's power must be focused. I will discuss this focused power in detail later, but the totally free method of fighting that is the fundamental essence of Aikido is made possible by the ability to draw upon this power at will from any part of the body.

In this kind of instantaneous attack, it becomes impossible to distinguish between an atemi and a throw. But it really doesn't matter because the aim is to defeat the opponent. Exactly how he is defeated is irrelevant.

The Straight Punch Comes Off The Front Knee

Let us now consider the straight punch, which is the basis of atemi. After all, the high percentage of knockouts in actual fighting situations results because of this punch.

Some of you probably find this hard to believe since, for a punch to be the decisive factor, it would have to be an extremely powerful blow. And yet you would be right if you said that you have never heard of karate or boxing-style training used to develop punching power in an Aikido dojo. In Aikido, we

don't usually practise striking the **makiwara**[14] or breaking bricks but we do have regular punching practice. It is nothing special – the basic movements and techniques that you practise repeatedly at the dojo are themselves the practice for punching.

What then is necessary for a powerful punch? If we are talking about the right side, when stepping in off of the right foot, the question is whether or not the body's center of gravity is riding on the right foot. If it is, the punch will be effective. When stepping forward in Aikido, it is critical to co-ordinate the entire body with that specific moment when one's power is focused and sent forward. However, most people fail to use the knees properly as they step in. As a result, the power generated by the forward movement of the center of gravity stops at the knee and is not transferred to the upper body, and hence, to the fist. This is why their punches are ineffective.

The key point is the pliability, the suppleness, of the knees. By pliable, however, I don't mean limp. It is more a question of whether you can smoothly push the knee forward as you step in, and in this way transfer the center of gravity forward. Naturally, with the forward movement of the front knee and the advancement of the hips, the rear leg gets drawn in. Once you've achieved this, you will be able to project the strength of your entire body into your fist and produce tremendous power. This is focused power.

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[14] The **makiwara** is a pad traditionally made of straw and tied to a pole or mounted on a wall. When practising striking or kicking techniques students of some martial arts will hit the makiwara repeatedly in order to improve the effectiveness of their technique. [Translator's note.]

Those who are accustomed to practising Aikido in the dojo will recognize that this movement is the same as that in **hiriki no yosei**[15], which we perform everyday before training. It is also similar to the movement in throwing techniques which sends the force of the forward motion into our hands, or to using the body's forward motion to apply reverse techniques. The most basic kinds of forward body movements in Aikido have fundamental application to punching movements. Of course, in real life situations you must be able to execute these movements within larger and faster motions.

Furthermore, it doesn't matter whether it is a lunge punch or a reverse punch. Adjust your responses freely, matching them to the requirements of the situation. The key points are the movement of the center of gravity, the transfer of this movement forward, and sending the power generated through this shifting into the fist. If you can co-ordinate each of these three things into a single movement, the punch will be effective.

Don't clench your fist too tightly, either. When you do, you end up putting unnecessary strain on your muscles and fail to send power into your arms. Having a sense of loosely clenching the fist and delivering a light blow will result in an effective technique.

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[15] **Hiriki no Yosei**, or "Elbow Power", has to do with the strength of the elbow. It is training which involves holding aloft the hand that has been grabbed. In #1 the movement is advancing, while #2 is practice in transferring the center of gravity while changing directions. This is part of the basic body movements of Aikido. [Editor's note.]

As for the fists themselves, they can be used in a variety of ways. You can use the straight front punch, or as I often like to do, you can strike with the second knuckle of the index or middle finger. Against a real opponent it is more effective to aim a one-knuckle punch, into which it is easy to focus power, at a weak point of the body. Remember, the opponent is a human being and not some hard object.

Wartime Experience Has Shown Me The Strength Of The Human Body

Even if you have a powerful punch, this alone is not enough to bring down your opponent. The reason is that the opponent is not a board or a brick, but a human being. People tend to move around and the structure of the body itself is a mixture of both the strengths and weaknesses unique to a living organism. This is why I believe that in Aikido, there is no sense in tempering the fists or practising breaking objects. The destruction of a stationary object and causing damage to a human body require fundamentally different techniques.

I came to a clear understanding of this during the Second World War when I was in China. However, even now I cannot recall this incident without a sense of revulsion. Although it is such an unpleasant memory, I will nevertheless share it so that young people will know about these deeds in which men undeniably took part.

It was an incident that took place at a Japanese army post during the invasion of China. On this occasion, a group of soldiers gathered in a corner of the encampment were causing a commotion. I went to see what was going on and discovered that they had surrounded a Chinese prisoner of war and were taking turns beating him. They were all black belts in either Karate or Kempo, and they were using the prisoner as an experiment to test whether they could truly deliver a single death blow with one of their punches. Someone would drive a punch at the unresisting prisoner with all his might. The Chinese prisoner would let out a groan and twist his body, and then the next punch would come flying in at him. With his body doubled over and his face grimacing in pain, he clenched his teeth and endured it all. Then, yet another fist would be driven into his stomach.

I had to look away from the scene. This insane act, in which men calmly made a mockery of another human being, went unchallenged, showing that war does in fact make men go mad. The Chinese prisoner, his eyes filled with hatred for the Japanese, endured this brutal onslaught. In the end he couldn't stand up any more, and I am sure that it was solely by the strength of his will that he

didn't give up. The Japanese soldiers, seeing that he was just not going to die, eventually grew tired and gave up.

Unlike boards or bricks, the human body is not something that can be destroyed by brute strength alone. A level of resistance which you would not ordinarily think possible tends to reveal itself especially when the opponent's spirit is strong. This was the unexpected lesson I learned from the insanity of war.

I urge all of you to keep these things in mind. Even the magnificent culture of the martial arts can be reduced to cruelty and violence, depending upon the intent of the individual. Driving a punch or some other technique, just for fun, at those who are weaker and don't resist has nothing to do with what we call budo.

Atemi Is All Timing

Well, what is it that is important for atemi then? It is timing. Even if you go and watch a boxing match, for example, you will often see someone get knocked out by a very casual looking punch. This is an example of judging the opponent's changing movements and punching with absolutely perfect timing.

opponent's changing movements and punching with absolutely perfect timing. The important thing is to send your punch as soon as you sense that the opponent is about to move. Then you will either hit whatever is closest to you or, conversely, when the opponent has swung at you and missed, you will hit him when he is fully extended.

The interesting thing is, if it is timed perfectly, you don't even need to use a lot of power for the punch to be effective. There won't be any pain in your fist and you won't be repelled by the force of the impact. It's exactly like batting in baseball. When you hit the ball squarely you really don't feel the force of the ball at all.

Let me give you a good example. This is an episode which involved Ueshiba Sensei during the time when the Korean Peninsula was under Japanese control.