

The Relationship between body art & weapon work

by Michael Schwendinger

O Sensei was one of the greatest martial artist in weapons and he developed aikido from weapon work. Iriminage, for example, is a technique where the attacker has a weapon and the defender has none. All body art techniques are also weapon techniques and vice versa. Tony Cassells Sensei showed this last year in Batto Ho. He said that, if we train body art, we should always think as if we had a weapon in our hand. Weapons teach us a lot for body art. Therefore, I would like to express my views on weapon training in Aikido in terms of its relationship to the body art. I believe that weapon training in Aikido is closely related to body art training. When I analyze the body movements, I see a lot of common movements between body art and weapon movements. I am convinced that the Aikido movements are derived from sword movements. First of all, when we hold a sword (or bokken), we tighten our little fingers, bring our elbows in - close to the body - so that the upper-arm touch the body, and keep our elbows and shoulders relaxed. When we open our hands after holding the sword position, the hand immediately becomes shuto (open-hand sword).

This use of the hand is important in Aikido. The tips of the fingers can be considered to be the tip of a sword. The tip must be alive. In contrast, when we grab our partner in body art, we must grab him as we would hold the sword, that is, by using the little fingers. We are often told to extend our ki through our fingertips. The same can be said with bokken or jo. Ki must flow through the tip of the weapon. Fingertips and the tip of a weapon are the gateway to the power.

When we train a martial art, we are told to cut with the hip, hold with the hip, and walk with the hip. The hip is the center of the body. The abdomen has to be expanded and the hip bone must be kept straight. When holding the sword in chudan kamae, you hold the sword with your hands; however, the weight of the sword must be transferred to and felt by the abdomen and hip bone. The sword must be connected to your hip. Knees must be relaxed (unlocked), and you must move your feet in suriashi (sliding/gliding) fashion. Sugiash can best be embodied by working with weapons. Although it is easy to forget the footwork during body art training, weapon training reminds us of the importance of suriashi.

In some ways, weapon training transfers directly to the body art training. A vertical cut with the sword transfers directly to shomenuchi with empty

hand. The kesa cut becomes yokomenuchi. The body movements and footwork of bokken and jo are the same as those of the body art. The vigorousness of the training can also be understood by weapon training. I study weapons a lot. I train in a way that I can extend my power (which is concentrated within my body), and express the power at the tip of my weapon. I believe that when we have the feeling that bokken or jo become part of our body, then we can use our hands as bokken or jo.

Finally, I would like to say that in weapon work, we also learn a lot for the right Mai Ai in Aikido. The distance to our opponent is in weapon work different to the distance in body art - also, if you work with a bokken or jo. Weapon work teaches me a lot. So I think it is important to train weapons. I am very happy that we have such a great teacher Shihan Tony Cassells, who in my opinion is, one of the best martial artists in weapon work worldwide. He teaches us Aikido from heart to heart - including a teacher-student-relationship - and this makes me very proud of my aikido.

I would like to thank Shihan Tony Cassells as well as Mark Pickering Sensei, who has been supporting Shihan T. C. here in Austria for many years.

Michael Schwendinger,
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