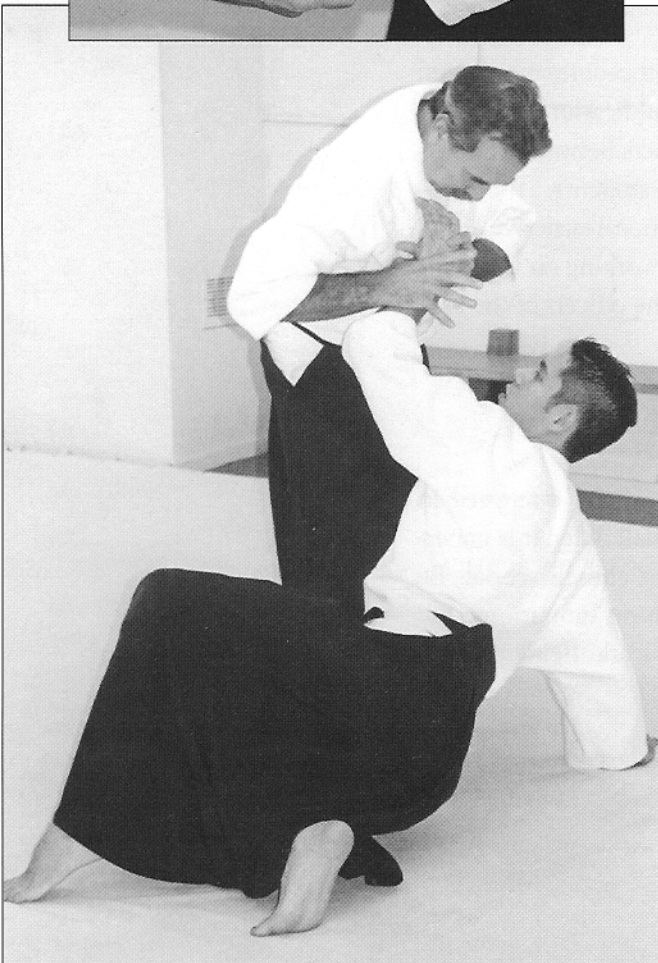
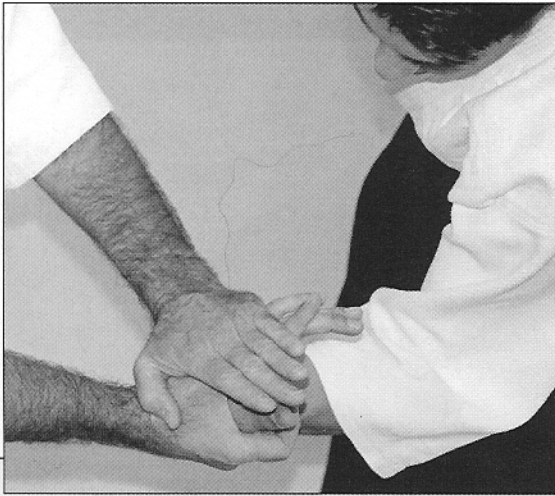


ENERGY PROJECTION IN AIKIDO WRIST TECHNIQUES

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As with all higher martial arts based on universal principles, aikido can be practiced and understood on many different levels. Over the years, an aikidoka will experience the same technique being performed in a myriad of ways, ranging from very athletic to extremely subtle. Of course, your perception of the technique will depend on your own athletic ability, maturity, and the level of your teachers. The first time I felt a *shihan* (master or “root” teacher), who was twenty-five years my senior, move me easily and with no apparent strength or speed, I was amazed and extremely excited. From that moment on, my focus shifted: my only desire was to direct my training and study toward the development of that energy.

Ultimately, you must forget about technique.

The further you progress, the fewer techniques there are.

The Great Path is really No Path.

– Ueshiba Morihei, founder of aikido

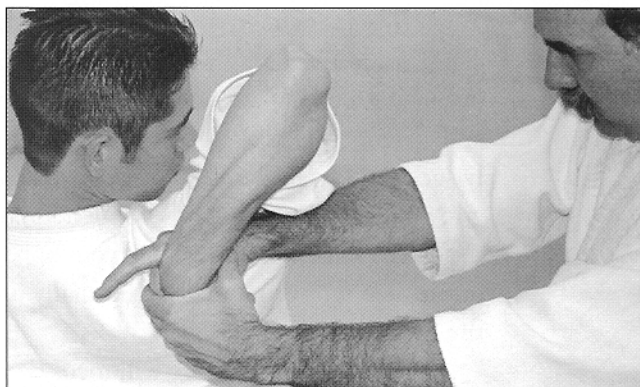
On a mechanical level, the fundamental aikido techniques of *nikyo* (second principle), *shihonage* (four directions throw), and *kotegaeshi* (wrist turn) all seem to be based on the principle of applying enough pressure (felt as pain) to your opponents’ wrists to convince them to compromise their balance to avoid further pain. Because of aikido’s nonviolent ideals, any refinement of technique that allows you to take your opponent’s bal-

ance with less pain or risk of injury elevates the art to a higher level.

As an internal martial art, aikido teaches its practitioners to use intention rather than strength or speed. Unfortunately, all too often this idea is expressed in theory, and although long-term practitioners eventually experience it, it is not usually explained with respect to specific basic techniques. Through the development of awareness and visualization, energy (*ki*) is projected beyond the physical limits of your body, and beyond and through a clearly defined target in your opponent's body. Your energy becomes unified and extended. To defend himself, your partner may attempt to relax and separate his joints so that this energy does not effect his center. You can overcome this by exploiting the limitation of his flexibility. In wrist techniques, this involves using a wrist lock simply to connect the wrist and forearm energetically to the elbow, then projecting your energy from the elbow to the shoulder and beyond so that when the technique is applied the target of the pressure is your opponent's spine and center of balance rather than their wrist.

This can be accomplished by "tightening the links." Imagine a chain composed of half a dozen large links with lots of slack between each link. If you push on a link on one end of the chain, the other end may not even move because the looseness of the links allows them to separate and move outward in all directions. Now, if you hold the chain at one end and twist the entire chain from the other end until the links are unified, then pressure on either end creates movement at the opposite end.

The classic example of the application of this idea in aikido is a technique that Ueshiba Morihei performed in the 1935 film, "Budo." As an attacker grabbed his lapel (*munedori*), master Ueshiba instantaneously aligned himself so that forward energy would lock his opponent's elbow. Then, by projecting his whole body forward from his center, he drove the now rigid arm directly into the attacker's shoulder and spine, knocking him completely off balance.



All photographs & calligraphy courtesy of Dave Champ.

By experiencing the hand, wrist, forearm, arm, and shoulder as links in a chain, you can modify your approach to *nikyo*, *shihonage*, and *kotegaeshi*, three of the mainstays of aikido training. Not only the bones, but the muscles, tendons, and other connective tissue can be used to link up the elements. To be completely successful, your hands must be relaxed and sensitive. Too much tension in the grip will not only stop the flow of energy, but also distract you from the awareness needed to sense the pathway to your opponent's center. In general, become aware of the amount of strength you normally use and try to forego its use altogether for the best result.

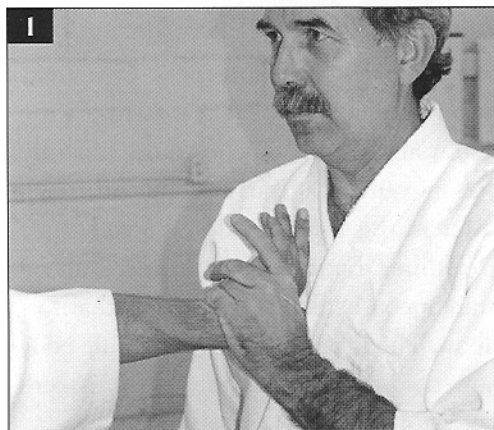
For the examples, we will focus on the actual execution of each technique, as that is the aspect that distinguishes the technique's individuality, and the preliminary movements vary with different attacks. The main thing to remember about body position is to keep your center lined up with your opponent's center. This requires a stable but moveable stance, in case your opponent should attempt to move outside of your center alignment to thwart your technique and counter with his own. This is essential if he wishes to perform *kaeshiwaza* (reverse techniques). At first, however, is it best to practice with someone who will remain still while you explore the sensations of extension and connection. Later, when you feel comfortable with this awareness, ask your *uke* (person receiving the technique) to attempt to move out of alignment and use your whole body movement to reestablish the energetic pathway.

Technical Section

二教技

Nikyo

Let's begin with *nikyo* (second principle). Although there are several versions of *nikyo* that can all make use of this idea, let's concentrate on the shoulder-assisted version of the technique. Use your left thumb in combination with your left little finger and ring finger to twist your partner's left hand until their left *tegatana* (hand blade) is pointing upward and twisted toward their face. Then rest the back of your left thumb on your right shoulder as in figure 1. Reach around with the fingers as far as necessary and tighten the wrist until you feel that you have connected the wrist to the forearm. Now, reach over the top of your partner's wrist with your right hand and press down and forward until you feel the forearm

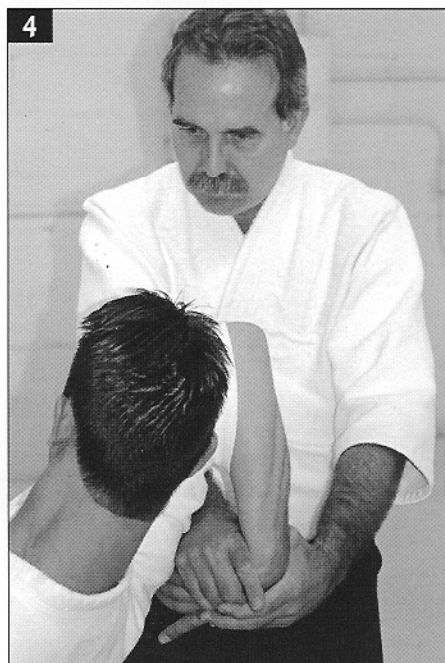


connecting to the elbow. If done properly, the *uke* will feel the connection immediately. Now, to connect the elbow into the shoulder, you have to keep a subtle but constant forward pressure on the linked structure leading to the shoulder. *Nikyo* is invariably taught with this forward pressure, but usually to keep the elbow bent. Also, for the correct alignment, the *uke*'s little finger must be aimed

directly at their center. When the correct connection of the links is felt and alignment is correct, apply downward and forward pressure at the wrist, visualizing a continuous pathway to the uke's center (see figure 2). Take your time and experiment with different partners. Those with more flexible joints will require somewhat more tension and more accurate alignment.

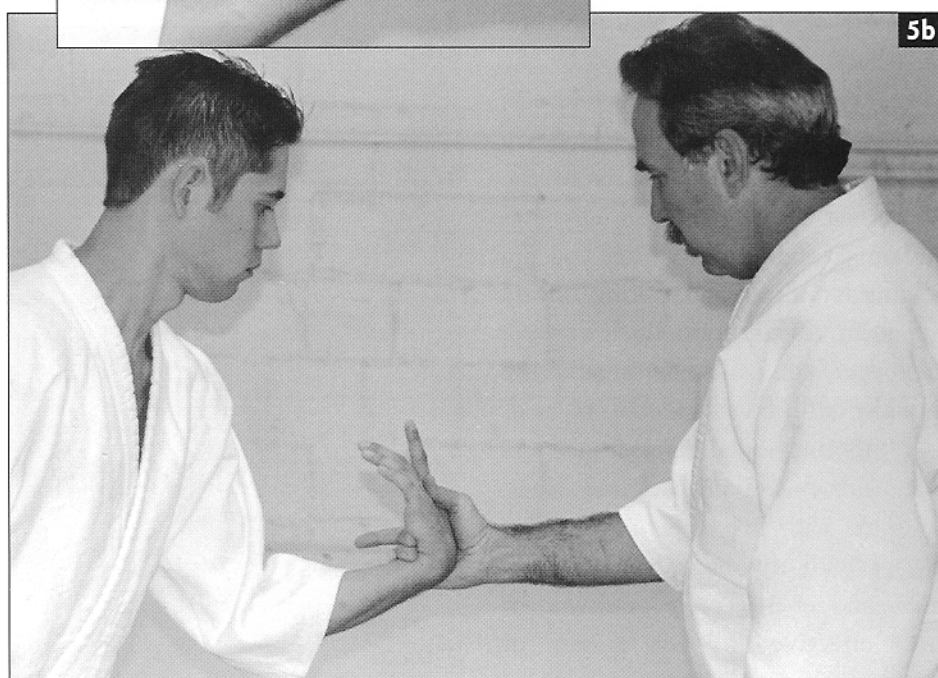
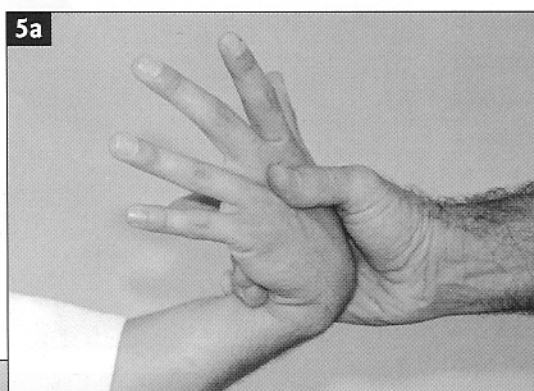
Shihonage

For shihonage, the links are tightened not by lining them up, but rather by bending them around in concentric circles until one end of the structure clearly affects the other end. With your right hand, grasp your partner's right hand at the wrist with the back of your hand facing away from you as shown in figure 3. Now gradually strike forward and downward as if striking with a sword. As with nikyo, your hand must be an instrument of sensory input as well as an instrument of energy output. So, relax and feel the tight circle created by the hand as it connects to the forearm. It is very important that the trajectory of the strike be toward the uke's back, in the line created by the natural bend of the arm, to avoid outward pressure on the elbow (see figure 4). As the forearm connects to the elbow, feel and visualize the elbow as the tip of the sword, which you are holding as one unit and striking forward and down. As you continue downward, the upper arm will tighten and the shoulder will be connected to your strike, thoroughly taking your partner's balance, both to their back and downward. As with nikyo, performing shihonage with this awareness of alignment and energy projection will be more effective and less painful or potentially harmful to your partner.



四方投げ

Finally, let's look at *kotegaeshi*. Nikyo tightened the links by turning and compressing them, *shihonage* by directing them in a spiral. *Kotegaeshi* tightens the links by turning and extending them. Take your partner's left hand in your right, with your thumb on the back of the hand just below and between the middle and ring finger knuckles, and your little and ring finger wrapped around the base of the wrist as shown in figures 5a-b. Visualize the pathway up the arm. Then, while pulling with the fingers, apply pressure with the thumb in the direction that causes the hand and wrist to tighten and link to the elbow. Feel the connection to the elbow. Experiment: turn the wrist in different directions until you find the clearest link. Now the extending part. Continuing the forward pressure on the wrist that energetically links it all the way to the elbow, direct that whole structure down and away from your partner's body, keeping your hand in front of your center and turn from your waist, until the elbow is linked to the shoulder and the shoulder drops down to an unbalanced position (figures 6a-b). Using your left hand to assist by pressing with your left palm on your right thumb, turn from your center, directing downward with your hands until you completely take your partner's balance and force them to take a fall.



It is essential to the execution of all three of these techniques that you establish an initial imbalance in the wrist and maintain that feeling while sequentially establishing further imbalance in the forearm, elbow, shoulder, and spine. Eventually, this projection will become second nature, and the entire process will be intuitive and immediate. Then you can reevaluate all of your techniques with respect to finding the most direct pathway to unbalancing your partner's center.

As the taijiquan classics say, there are three levels of practice: hands, torso, and mind. When we begin our aikido journey, we tend to see the techniques as hands and arms manipulating hands and arms. Eventually, we connect our hands and arms to our center and move as one whirling unit from the center of our *hara* (lower abdomen). If we can also connect our center to our opponent's center through the correct use of visualization (mind), then hands, arms, and torsos become but instruments of our true center, and our practice becomes effortless, safer, and infinitely more enjoyable.

