

## A TRIBUTE TO KENJI TOMIKI SENSEI & HIDEO OBA SENSEI

from

Dr. Ah Loi Lee 7<sup>th</sup> Dan Shihan Japan Aikido Association,  
7<sup>th</sup> Dan Iaido Renshi Zen Nihon Kendo Renmei,  
7<sup>th</sup> Dan Jodo Renshi Zen Nihon Kendo Renmei.

After more than 46 years of practise and study I have decided to articulate my new and better understanding, and my admiration, on the genius of Kenji Tomiki Sensei 8<sup>th</sup> Dan Judo, 8<sup>th</sup> Dan Aikido and his trusted aide Hideo Oba Sensei, 8<sup>th</sup> Dan Judo, 8<sup>th</sup> Dan Aikido, in their development of Tomiki System of aikido. This will be of particular interest for those who have a desire to find out more about the Tomiki System of aikido than just the "follow me attitude ". If this System is followed studiously and diligently, paying attention to your own training/development, you will accept that there is no end and, with sheer admiration and respect, never stop.

### UNSOKU

By this simple exercise of moving in eight directions, you have trained your body to move in any direction without thought. That is, you have instinctively balanced on your feet. You cannot deal with an opponent if you have to rebalance first, and thus be too late with your movement.

*I have noticed that many practitioners do not pay enough attention to their own "oneness" of being in as perfect a "body/mind balance" as possible each time they do unsoku. My observation is that the following foot is always slower. Yes, at the start of the exercise it may be well timed but it then deteriorates probably due to lack of concentration.*

### TANDOKU UNDO

This consists of moving forwards, backwards, at angles, and hip turning. Having trained your footwork, you now learn to combine and coordinate hand/arm movements in time with foot work and keep in balance, firstly with same hand and foot (homo-lateral), then confusion as opposite hand and foot movements (cross-lateral) are introduced.

*Again, many practitioners try to remember the sequence and then don't continue to develop further this powerful basic training of aikido control of the opponent. Developing your tandoku undo practice progressively trains the practitioner into making circular movements, be they big or small, which are the essence of aikido.*

### UKEMI

There are only three basic ways to fall, backward without rolling right over as it is considered dangerous during randori practise, sideways and forward. Ukemi practice is not just to learn how to fall safely, which is very important, but also, by accepting the throws one can feel the power of the aikido techniques and try to produce that in your training. Most important of all, unless you can fall, your partner cannot practise their aikido techniques and since training is about having bodies to throw or control, it stands to reason that no one is going to be just fodder for you to practise on if it is not reciprocal.

*I notice that this is the most difficult skill that stops many from continuing further. The more you practise this, the more supple and fitter you become and practitioners will also develop internal strength of their organs without realising it.*

## RANDORI-NO-KATA

As the name implies, this is the basic foundation for *randori*, a kind of free practice without set techniques or sequence. The randori-no-kata of 17 techniques has been subdivided into:

- 5 Atemi waza,
- 5 Kansetsu waza,
- 4 Tekubi waza,
- 3 Otoshi waza.

The descriptive names help to focus on the intent of the techniques.

Atemi implies a hit or strike but since we are practising aikido (harmony with your opponent) the hitting/slamming/punching is replaced with a controlled contact push/throwing feeling. This is extremely difficult to achieve. Atemi-waza throw someone on their back, either by a frontal, sideways or rear application of technique on uke. Without first controlling uke, by catching their hands, it is extremely difficult to apply technique, especially when they are attacking forwards and if your timing is out obviously with avoidance (*tai sabaki*), you will meet their incoming power and obviously get stopped in your tracks, unless you are bigger.

*Timing the opponent's footwork is of the essence here. When the opponent's front foot lands the throw happens at that split second before they can use the other foot to regain balance. Obviously the angle of your attack also matters.*

Kansetsu waza are techniques applied to, or use the leverage, of the joints. There are *hiji-waza* or elbow techniques and *tekubi-waza* or wrist techniques. If you only remember this point you will come a long way as the techniques teach you how to control the opponent via the elbow joint.

*Tekubi-waza are particularly useful when your opponent is bigger and stronger as this is their weakest part.*

*I have noticed that not many really understand the finer and subtle points and replace with strength.*

Otoshi means to throw down and the descriptive word for uke is floating so your opponent feels like flying through the air before landing.

*Such a difficult move but with a good partner and lots of training it is unstoppable and gives a wonderful feeling of disposing of the attacker effortlessly.*

As implied, this set of randori-no-kata was put together from the founder's own extensive training and profound knowledge of Judo and Aikido and his feeling that some form of free practice would enhance practitioners' ability in a free situation - i.e. not formalised and in consecutive order as with kata form.

*Again, not enough discipline has been put into this training method. After learning some or all of the randori-no-kata practitioners can practise kakarigeiko. This is a practice in which your partner allows you to put on any of the 17 techniques, then, gradually puts in some escapes if the technique is not applied well enough. This level of practice pushes you further to improve your application of technique and is called Hikitategeiko. Finally, we end up with Randori geiko in which you have to do techniques against an uncooperative partner, certainly the most difficult level of practice as you have to keep in mind not to damage your partner.*

*Eventually all 3 levels of practice should merge into 1 as you advance in mind and body togetherness.*

*These forms of free practice should be varied so that one does not become stuck in training only against a "rubber knife" or equivalent sponge-like knife. It was never Tomiki Sensei's or Oba Sensei's intention that this form of free practise should stop with just the rubber knife which is often the case in some clubs.*

*In randori practice too often brute force emerges and the lesson is not learned that one should try to harmonise with your partner's energy. At this stage it is a long way before you can even feel you have learned aikido. Competition is the final level of randori practice but is not the ultimate goal of training. In competition, technique is applied once only as opposed to repetitive training of a particular technique. Unfortunately because there is a winner and a loser in competition the importance of winning often seems to take over when both participants should see that it is only a game created to test our practice of aikido which includes control of mind as well as body.*

*A competition event also gives Tomiki Aikido practitioners (competitors and judges and supporters) an excuse to come from far and wide to meet and make friends by training together and learn from each other outside their normal dojo confines. The senior members which should include all 5<sup>th</sup> Dans and above should try to use this opportunity to exchange knowledge humbly and enjoy the training with someone different but with the same ideas. Again this chance is often missed due to focusing only on the competition.*

### KORYU NO KATA

The name means traditional or old style. These techniques have also been grouped into sets of kata. There are six koryu sets consisting of 16 to 50 forms to facilitate learning/remembering some of the original techniques as taught by Morhei Ueshiba Sensei, teacher to Tomiki and Oba Sensei.

*What I see is just learning the sequence of the kata and paying lip service for examination and competition purposes rather than continuing to study further and thus find the connection between randori and koryu forms. The underlying principles of practice and application of randori and koryu forms are both the same. It is just that for safety, competitive randori is restricted to 17 forms, one type of attack, against only one armed attacker. This differs markedly to the varied forms in koryu.*

*The genius here is putting techniques into a set for an easier reminder and reinforcement of particular movements. It can be noted that some techniques are repeated in the different koryu sets. Also there is weapon work in the koryu which gives the aikidoka some historical link to Japanese Budo and maybe stimulate some to take up other Japanese Budo, particularly weapons work. This would certainly inspire aikidoka to keep training long past their youthful randori days.*

Since starting Iaido and Jodo in 1981 and having continued to practise and study these arts, I suddenly realise how much the Zen Nihon Kendo Renmei (ZNKR) has in common with Tomiki Sensei's aikido system of training. All three, aikido, iaido and jodo, have the equivalent of very basic training on which standards are set:

- Randori No Kata (17 forms),
- ZNKR Iaido Seitei Kata (12 forms),
- ZNKR Jodo Seitei Kata (12 forms).

Then all three have their koryu which keeps the traditional knowledge and thus furthers the depth of each respective budo. In the case of Iaido this koryu section enables the different schools to maintain their original lineage such as Muso Shinden Ryu and Muso Jikkiden Ryu (the 2 largest following and by implication the most varied as it depends on the headmaster's style being passed down) plus several other schools (Ryu Ha) such as Shinkage Ryu, Tamiya Ryu, Hoki Ryu, to

name a few. In the case of Jodo, again the koryu practised depends on your sensei and by implication your family tree if you have been accepted. To the uninitiated it all looks different.

In the past, these budo were known by the names, iaijutsu, battojutsu and jojutsu. To this day you will find this terminology is still in use alongside their modern counterparts.

I feel very privileged to practise Muso Shinden Ryu and also Jodo under my sensei Shizufumi Ishido 8<sup>th</sup> Dan Hanshi Iaido, 8<sup>th</sup> Dan Jodo, 7<sup>th</sup> Dan Kendo in Kawasaki, Japan and I don't have to waste precious time travelling to train under two different sensei for my arts.

Finally my own aikido resume and why I feel I can put forward words of praise for the Founder of the Tomiki System.

I am Chinese, originally from Singapore but have lived in UK from 1954-2003 when I emigrated to Western Australia, cannot read or write Japanese, and a female, which in the budo world, puts me in the minority. However, after so many years of instructors visiting London and in turn me travelling to Japan and training I have made good connections/relationships with a number of teachers. I first trained in London under Senta Yamada Sensei from 1961-1966 (when he returned to Japan), then Naito Sensei when he came to London in 1968 followed by Takeshi Inoue Sensei 1968-1971, then I packed my bags [after graduating as a doctor of medicine from London University in 1965] to follow Inoue Sensei and train under his teachers, Tomiki and Oba Sensei, in Japan in 1971 where I stayed for 5 months before returning to London. Since then I have kept in regular and constant contact with all those teachers until their deaths.

From Oba sensei, I was given to understand that Tomiki sensei concentrated on developing the randori system and asked Oba to develop the koryu system, since he would not have the time to do both. Oba Sensei was instrumental in pointing me down the path of weapons study in the direction of Iaido and Naginata (which I did not continue in due to returning to London and no teacher to follow). Senta Yamada Sensei influenced me in Jodo. I feel privileged to have the opportunity to continue both Iaido and Jodo as I am getting too old to do Ukemi in aikido – HA HA! I have, in fact, continued my study of Japanese budo, because I have such a wonderful Iaido and Jodo Sensei. Importantly, as my own parents were too busy with supporting our family and in those days budo was far from anyone's mind, Oba Sensei was like a father to me in the sense of mentor and I continue to practise budo with his spirit in my heart.

Having migrated to Perth, Western Australia for the wonderful climate and space, I continue to practise aikido, iaido and jodo, and I still travel regularly to Japan for practice.

June 2007 Western Australia