

# Linking Aikido to NLP - Part II

by Bruce K. Stewart

Aikido is a relatively young martial art, yet its roots can be traced back to feudal Japan. It actually took form on the training mats of professional Japanese martial arts masters in Tokyo around 1933. Since then it has traveled around the world, proving itself a formidable martial art and proficient approach to problem solving and conflict resolution. Here we will explore how Aikido can be used to expand readers' understanding of their own art, NLP.

Aikido's philosophy and movement exemplify the very rapport, respect and clarity that NLP summons. Aikido considers people's troubles in such a positive light that they are seen as the unwinding of a virtuous life. Performing Aikido, like any solution oriented technique, is as much a state of mind as a state of body. As Steven Gilligan says, "Any significant shift in psychological experience will be accompanied by a shift in somatic experience." In our experience, effective Aikido happens more like a sneeze than, let's say, animated conversation, because it happens to your whole body all at once.



## Basis of Comparison

NLP techniques describe the way people move consciously or unconsciously toward change. Aikido brings those changes to life through a set of movements designed around essential principles. Both NLP and Aikido techniques

have a *beginning, middle and end* as well as other shared perceptions.

Aikido requires *collaboration* of both partners rather than the usual *competition* emphasized in most martial arts. NLP also requires participants to collaborate in solving a problem, rather than continuing its injurious effects. Aikido calls this approach *Safety*

Way, and uses its unique movements to present the states of change from problem to solution. What is Aikido's solution? It is to show people how to move through difficult situations, injury free. The resulting effects on the psyche, when practiced regularly, are stimulating, generative, and fulfilling. Case in point . . .

Once a friend, David, came up to my wife and me at our New Year's Eve party and told us that we had saved his life. Since we hadn't seen him for over two years, we wondered how this could be possible. When we asked how, he replied that he had been riding his bike in New Orleans one Saturday morning on his way to the market. He slowed down before crossing an intersection and proceeded once it was clear. The corner was a four-way stop and, unfortunately, he had neglected to look in one direction. It so happened that a car ran the stop sign in that direction.

By the time David noticed his oversight, it was too late. The car hit his bike and hurled him on top of the hood. Somehow, in the midst of things, David remembered seeing an Aikido demonstration that Lou and I had done several years before. Spontaneously he performed an Aikido roll across the car's hood and ended up standing safely on the opposite corner facing the amazed driver! David did this in spite of the fact that he had never actually done an Aikido roll; he had only seen them performed in our demonstration.

This story dramatically points out that Aikido involves the subconscious as well as the conscious mind of practitioners. When studied for longer periods of time, this martial art has some incredibly positive effects on practitioners health and neuro-logical levels.

## Beginning, Middle, End

Aristotle was probably the first to formally organize his thoughts into this frame of reference. He loved the art of refinement as much as any other. Aristotle saw that all living things have a birth, growth, and decline. He used this progressive triad as a backdrop for streamlining his philosophical writings.

In Aikido the *beginning* posture of the technique is called *Kamae*. This starting posture emphasizes the value of *proper balance, breathing, and overall composure* (see "Linking Aikido to NLP," *Anchor Point*, Nov. 2000). For, if these qualities do not exist, the practitioner rapidly loses control of the situation.

In order to maintain the greatest control over yourself and situations, it is useful to relax and be yourself, unfettered with extraneous agendas or ideas. Such an open attitude offers you significant advantages, especially in stressful situations. This attitude is often nominalized as *Zen*, and occurs easily when combined with a technique (*middle*) for handling opponents that is *collaborative*.

Correctly applied, Aikido's powerful yet flowing techniques end with all participants healthy and safe from injury.

To do Aikido accurately, you must seize the moment by grasping the only opportunity you have for riding on the movement generated by your partner, and then circling it back upon itself. When done effectively, the gap between partner and Aikidoist is reduced to a fraction of a moment in between space and time. When this moment manifests, you can feel that you are in the *groove*, which in Chinese is called the *Tao* or *Way of Life*.

Similarly, in NLP you circle back the positive intention. What you do in an NLP technique is let the intent of the problem space figure directly into the solution or *Way of Life*. That way, resistance is dissipated as its positive intention is re-circulated into the solution.

Aikidoists enjoy showing how the philosophy of prevention, harmony, and, ultimately, love can be demonstrated in its practice. Like NLP, in order to successfully practice Aikido, you must commit yourself to a certain amount of training time. The more training, the better the effects. And these effects can easily benefit many aspects of your life. Actually, this happens as unconsciously as it does consciously, so you can forget about *trying* to learn Aikido. It just happens naturally, because its movements allow you to become more

integrated as a person and more congruent as a human being.

## Aikido's Six (6) Principles

These six principles describe the steps for working with a partner or client. With these guidelines, you will discover how effortlessly Aikido can move *pacing* into the art of *leading*. Let's explore the relationship between this set of Aikido Principles and NLP's Reframing, a technique familiar to most practitioners. For the sake of making a simple comparison, you can locate these principles in Figure #1 below. Be aware that the principles are initially taught slowly in order to form a kinesthetic chain, and yet are performed quite rapidly in an actual Aikido technique.

### STEP 1:

**Blend by Leading** – Koichi Tohei, a leading Aikido master, developed the first five of these principles from the teachings of Morihei Ueshiba, Aikido's founder. Aikido practitioners learn how to blend their movements with their partner's. This mirroring step shows how blended movements can lead your attacker (*partner*) from a position of conflict toward a *collaborative* solution. To the casual observer, blended movements look more like dancing than martial arts. However, this unique ability to blend allows Aikidoists to lead potential conflicts into solid solutions without using force.

Correspondingly, NLPers apply well-formedness condi-

tions to *define the problem space* in potential conflicts, rather than having their clients ask for what they don't want. Simply stated, reframing and other NLP techniques allow practitioners to blend with their clients by having problems stated in a positive light. This effectively leads clients into a solution state of mind with little or no resistance.

### STEP 2:

**Know Your Partner's Mind**—Aikido further refines the distinctions made in Step #1 by placing two primary techniques in the hands of practitioners: *Irimi* and *Tenkan*. Both help you reveal the character of your partner's mind. (*Partner* will be used now instead of *attacker*, which is often used in martial art discussions).

Figure #1

Aikido	Reframing
1. Blend by leading to a solution	Define the problem space
2. Know your partner's mind	Are you willing to communicate about what part is responsible?
3. Respect your partner's position	Separate the behavior from the positive intention of the part responsible
4. Put yourself in your partner's place	Choose 3-10 alternative behaviors
5. Perform with confidence	Check for resistance
6. Follow through (Zanshin)	Future pace

*Irimi* means entering *directly* into a situation before it becomes a problem. In medicine and business, we know the value of taking care of things before it's too late or, more simply, prevention. This *direct* approach can also take the shape of *preempting*. The use of *Irimi* often requires using a linear movement (or *straight forward* thinking) pattern. Mentioning a pressing issue to a colleague could constitute an effective application of *Irimi*. The theme here is to take care of the situation in its earliest stages rather than waiting.

Using *Tenkan*, on the other hand, is usually determined by the fact that the problem has already begun to manifest. As a result, the

situation calls for an *indirect* approach. Not that it is too late for a direct procedure, but rather the situation would be more elegantly handled indirectly. In a martial arts scenario, this means that the partner has already initiated his attack. In such situations, Aikido practitioners must adjust their mind and body position to accommodate the oncoming attack (problem).

In daily living, the use of *Tenkan* allows us to manifest needed resources for handling a problem effortlessly. *Tenkan* techniques often proceed along a circular or *round about* path. This requires a certain amount of composure, which is why *The Four (4) Mindbody Coordination Keys* (see "Linking Aikido to

NLP," *Anchor Point*, Nov. 2000) are so important to practice even if you are not an Aikidoist.

In Reframing, the question is: *Are you willing to communicate about what part of you is responsible for this problem?* On unconscious levels, this is the place where the fusion of NLP and Aikido becomes obvious. In a martial art situation, if there is time for a question, it might actually be, *Are you sure you want to do this?* This would allow a person a similar opportunity to check in with themselves and be responsible for their actions. We can see here how NLP and Aikido bring unconscious information to light.

The value of practicing the *Irimi* and *Tenkan* movements from Aikido are noteworthy and impressive. They provide you with the correct framework for understanding the difference between situations that require *direct* versus *indirect* approaches. This kinesthetic level of knowing allows practitioners to develop a more subtle and discriminating mind. In other words, if left unattended, situations that prompt either *Irimi* or *Tenkan* movements could soon get out of hand and become problems. By practicing both *direct* and *indirect* Aikido awareness and movements, NLP practitioners can effectively *prevent* problems from materializing.

#### STEP 3:

**Respect Your Partner's Position-** In Aikido, this step signifies a moment when you realize the position of your partner

(problem space) and yet have no need to change it. This is revealed best when a person can tell that their interests are being respected, they usually become more amiable, less defensive. Often this tends to disarm them and assuage their negative feelings about the problem situation.

Contrasted to this, in Reframing you encourage clients to *separate the behavior from the positive intention of the part responsible*. The NLP connection to Aikido here comes from consciously creating an atmosphere of *respect*. NLP offers clients so much respect that they can choose to keep the redeeming qualities of their existing behavior. Both arts go to great

lengths to convey that the partner is not "wrong," but rather needs some healthy feedback or exchange.

#### STEP 4:

**Put Yourself in Your Partner's Place** - This principle is the Aikido equivalent of the old Joe South song *Walk a Mile in My Shoes*. In Reframing, clients are encouraged to *arm* themselves with 3-10 *alternative behaviors to the problem*. NLP supportively presents practitioners with the opportunity to take a meta position to their own problem. This opportunity can significantly improve rapport while adding measures of responsibility and depth to the interaction.

In Aikido, this step furthers the process of leading your partner into a solution based on mutually collaborative efforts. The partner's initial posture and attitude (problem space) provide the necessary information for the practitioner to blend with. However, in contrast to NLP, Aikido requires the practitioner to initiate change. The results of *Knowing Your Partner's Mind* manifest into physical form when the practitioner makes either a *direct (Irimi)* or *indirect (Tenkan)* movement. How can you tell when to do which? Easy.

For instance let's say that you just dropped a coin. If you pin the

coin down immediately and are thus able to stop the coin from rolling, you have employed a *direct (Irimi)* approach. If the coin drops and then rolls, you use an *indirect (Tenkan)* technique when you snatch it up somewhere along its customary circular path. Note that in both cases, your mind knows the coin well enough (Step #2 - *Know Your Partner's Mind*) to head it off with either a *direct* or *indirect* technique. This example exhibits the kind of intuitive knowing with which Aikido practitioners become imbued through practice. Such knowing is based on a study of human *movement* patterns. NLP practitioners, in contrast, base their knowing on studying human *behavior* patterns.

If you try to seize the coin with a *direct* snatch technique, you can easily miss your opportunity. Chances are that once the coin starts rolling, you will do better to use the more *indirect*, circular approach. This is just as true when applying an NLP technique. In order to be successful, you must become expert at pacing your coin's (client's) path.

One of Milton Erickson's children, Roxanna Erickson Klein, recalled a situation that led to an *indirect (Tenkan)* intervention. She wanted to take Spanish in the sixth grade but lacked the required grades in English. After explaining the problem, her father suggested she join the school lunch program. Roxanna could not understand

what this had to do with her desire to learn Spanish. After joining, she found herself sitting at the same lunch table as the new Hispanic students. Soon she was speaking Spanish fluently! Like Milton Erickson, Aikidoists take responsibility for changing their own perspective (position) before they expect to see change in their partner. This initial pacing leads their partner into the language of Aikido movements (*Irimi & Tenkan*) where they can discover behavioral options with more satisfying outcomes.

#### STEP 5:

**Lead With Confidence** - This step moves Aikido from the physical and mental levels into the emotional and spiritual. As Robert Dilts suggests, *Leading involves the attempt to get another person to change or add to or enrich his or her world view or thinking process.* Aikido must be performed with a "can do" attitude. Whenever a practitioner *confidently* leads others into a technique, s/he increases the likelihood that the outcome will turn out favorably. This is as true in presenting yourself to a new client as it is in making any sort of communication. Lacking confidence changes the state of the practitioner so dramatically that s/he begins to doubt, distrust, or resist. These states cannot be allowed by an Aikido practitioner, as they produce results outside their realm of control. In martial arts this could lead to injury or death.

In order to create the best results, it is best to openly display

confidence. In this step, Aikido helps you feel what it is like to be a leader by physically putting you into the shoes of confidence. Practitioners illustrate this easily with a direct, *Irimi* movement that steps right up into the problem and then blends. To be effective, the *direct* movement calls for superb timing and a strong spirit. This is the type of confidence that *knows* the change will take place in positive directions.

In this step, NLPers check for *client resistance*. This is so practitioners will be *confident* that their client is making an ecology check into their alternative behaviors. Once that this has been done, practitioners can *confidently* proceed to the final step.

#### STEP 6:

**Zanshin or Follow Through** – As in any endeavor, *Follow Through* is an essential part of the success formula. Whether it's making business contacts, watering your garden or just swinging a golf club, *Follow Through* assures that the direction or technique you have chosen will be most productive. In Aikido, *Zanshin* means *continuing mind*. This concept of taking care of yourself and your partner even after you have thrown them, galvanizes a peaceful solution into an otherwise contentious situation. NLP uses the term *Future Pace* here to convey the sense of continuing the positive effects beyond the intervention itself. This is where the client accepts responsibility for using the alternative behaviors s/he generated in Step #4.

## Blending Two into One

No matter what NLP technique you use, all are designed to obtain generative responses, and move the client from the problem to the desired state in a safe, ecological way. Aikido mirrors this practice. Most importantly, NLP requires practitioners to employ all their techniques in response to the feedback generated from their client. This is also true in Aikido, which initiates no attacks.

In both Aikido and NLP, problem spaces elucidate multi-level solutions. Each art can play off the other because they offer complimentary yet distinctive angles on problem solving. Is it the *beginning*, *middle* or *end* of the technique that illuminates your partner's path? The *middle* frequently defines the direction of the solution and its effects. While the *beginning* and *end* are inseparably linked to the outcome, and

reflect each other. Like the ends of a circle, one leads either consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly to the other. As the story of Hasan Basri reveals: "One time I saw a child coming toward me holding a lighted torch in his hand. 'Where have you brought the light from?' I asked him. He immediately blew it out, and said to me, 'O Hasan, tell me where it is gone, and I will tell you whence I fetched it.'" Now with a little Aikido to embellish your NLP, you'll be better able to illuminate solutions for your clients.



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