

Aiki Atemi

(This article was inspired by Ellis Amdur's "Atemi: Striking to the Heart of the Matter" in *Aiki News* #99, 1994.)

If an art is to be used in self-defense, it must incorporate *atemi* (striking) of some sort. Even if faking a strike is ethically preferred to an actual strike, one must be able to deliver the strike/fake convincingly or it will quickly be ignored like the boy who cried Wolf.

Ju-jutsu systems automatically include *atemi*. Aiki-ju-jutsu, at least at its developmental stages, also utilizes *atemi*. However, traditional Aikido and very advanced Daito-ryu Aiki-ju-jutsu set it aside, the former because Aikido aspires to an ethical ideal of harmony and peace, the latter because striking would interfere with advanced Daito's technical preference for controlling the nervous system and balance of the opponent.

It seems therefore that an Aikido practitioner would need to add some striking art to her repertoire if she wanted to successfully apply her Aikido in self-defense. There are two problems here: (1) Aikido, as it commonly is taught around the world, deals successfully with overt striking attacks that are both large and have developed momentum (rather than short, sharp, and powerful karate strikes), therefore practitioners seldom learn to use any other kind of strikes, and (2) that even if an appropriate striking art were appended to Aikido training, it would likely interfere with the very momentum that Aikido's fluid techniques depend upon.

Problem 1. The large, momentous attacks that Aikido demonstrates against often give it the reputation of having "compliant attackers". Well, yes and no. Certainly there are Aikido schools that train attackers not only to signal their large-motion attacks, but also cooperate with the defender's technique both for their own safety and so that the defender can learn the proper flow of the technique. These schools likely do not emphasize Aikido for self-defense. There are also schools that emphasize self-defense, but explain that their *waza* work only against committed attacks that they can see coming. I believe this is a fair assessment, but also believe that these schools are in a very small minority. A larger minority, in my opinion, is comprised of schools the students of which, having learned the standard large-and-telegraphed methods as a way to train beginners, would like to graduate into more realistic Aikido-as-self-defense, but do not know how to do it with reverting to a harder ju-jutsu-like execution. Also, long standing tradition, their federation, or inexperience with other martial arts may stymie them.

Problem 2. Karate-ka are taught to root their stance so that their strikes transfer force from the ground to the opponent. Taking a karate stance, even for a moment, destroys the Aikido-ka's ability to keep her technique fluid and sacrifices her ability to keep the attacker off balanced. The most reasonable solution, I believe, is to sacrifice the use of power-strikes for quick distracting or "disturbing" strikes in the process of delivering the fluid Aikido technique.

When I teach freestyle (*randori*) to aiki-ju-jutsu brown belts, I include a drill that not only emphasizes fluid motion but also shows how glancing, folding, stinging strikes can be merged with the fluid action of a technique. For examples, please see volume 2 of our 2-DVD set [*Aiki Freestyle*](#).

If the Takeshin Aiki training method of teaching freestyle works against relatively large but increasingly more powerful attacks, this leaves us with Problem 1: how do Aikido or fluid aiki-ju-jutsu systems learn to receive shorter, sharper, more powerful striking attacks and how do they incorporate strikes without having to employ another art that will interfere with their aiki flow?

More on this next time.