

Aiki Atemi 2

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

...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?

One of the problems with Aikido as self-defense is that its repertoire of techniques is ill-equipped to turn blows that attack from a shorter distance (either a karate or boxing distance) into a connection that (1) make the attacker unable to follow up, and (2) off balances him. The late Shihan Kuroiwa and Shihan Nishio of Aikido have dealt somewhat with this problem using boxing and karate. Having had both a boxing and karate background myself, I liked their approaches, and found that my fourth *dan* Seiken Budo receptions (see the 3-DVD set [Minimal Motion Seiken Budo](#)), although somewhat different, complimented their ways of thinking. Seiken Budo is a new system for an Aikido student, to be sure, but it is one that can be learned in a relatively short time and that often merges nicely with Aikido waza. It does not, however, train Aikido people how to trike powerful when an opening exists.

Many karate-ka are surprised to know that their "blocks" can also be strikes and that their blocking or striking kata movements can also be throws. Similarly, most Aikido and aiki-ju-jutsu teachers and students don't realize is that the shapes of their technique can be applied as striking or block-strike combinations without having the intent to end in a takedown or throw (see [Secret Strikes: The Hidden Atemi of Aiki](#)). We call this concept "Striking by Shape". Imagine that you are in Aikido class. The *uke* seizes your left wrist with his right hand. You off balance him by sweeping your right palm down his forearm, holding the back of his right hand and looping his arm back toward his face to apply an *ikkyo* movement. Now imagine instead that his extended arm reaching for your wrist is a punch and that your off-balancing palm sweep is a reception/block. You don't bother to secure the back of his hand but you do loop your own arm toward his face to deliver a backfist strike. Your left hand that previously reached out to press his arm down in *ikkyo* instead reaches out to strike his ribs. Voila! The shape of the *ikkyo* technique has become a fluid block/strike combination.

Decades ago I told my students that practicing their aiki techniques outside of class would be more difficult than practicing karate techniques since karate could easily be practiced alone by running through several kata. Two of my students, accustomed to working with each other in class, politely disagreed with me.

"How do you practice your aiki alone, then?" I asked.

One of them answered to the approving nods of the other: “The same way we practice karate. We treat each technique as a mini-kata and try to run through it with perfect form, imagining the uke at the other end of the movement.

One of the advantages of karate kata is that a practitioner *has* to envision an opponent since none is provided. This means that students might picture different applications for the same kata movement. In aiki-arts, however, we lock ourselves into the interpretation of a movement that we first learned with a partner. If we practice solo once in a while, we might just discover that we have already learned actions that can serve as effective atemi without having to learn another art.