

Samurai News from Honbu



AIKIBUJUTSU

おおきい **SPECIAL!**



ISF
AB
KTRR

Issue 0022

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Kaiso's Corner

This issue of Samurai news is focused on Aikibujutsu. I plan to have future issues of Aikibujutsu for branches that are involved in Aikibujutsu and Bojutsu.

In the past, we have had students attend seminars out of state. Sensei Bruno had traveled from Quebec to Illinois and Sensei Lou traveled from New York to Georgia by car. We have students who drive 4-6 hours to learn Shinkendo, Aikido, Bojutsu. I hope that they study hard and teach one day.

On the weekend of Valentine's day, Sensei Dan, Sensei Jillian, Michael, and Amanda drove 29 hours (over 2000 miles/ 3,200 kilometer- the distance from Hokaido to Kyushu) to attend private lessons at the Honbu dojo. They looked forward to cutting bamboo for the first time while they were LA. This is probably the longest distance a student has traveled by car to attend class. Sensei Dan said that there was ice in New Mexico while he was driving. There are over 40 students in Iowa, and they have done about 40 demonstrations last year alone. I feel grateful they traveled so far to learn.

The March issue will focus on branches in Europe.

Toshishiro Obata



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From the Newsroom

It's great to see so many people submitting articles for this Aikibujutsu newsletter. I'm going cross-eyed from editing this thing but it's worth it, because I think a lot of folks in the Federation have been wishing for a shift of more attention to the "AB" part of the ISF/AB/KTRR organization, including myself.

So to all those who have patiently waited, let the shift begin!

Well, at least starting with the newsletter. Hopefully this coming Christmas, the Samurai elves will cook up an Aikibujutsu seminar so the Shinkendokas don't hog up all the fun!

Just a couple of quick technical notes, when you submit to the newsletter, please copy news@shinkendo.com even if you send directly to Obata Kaiso. Also, to make life easier if there's any way you can make your doc a "Word" attachment, that would make editorial life oh so much easier :)

Please keep sending those articles!

Thanks and Jinsei ... Aikibujutsu ;>

James Huang

"Not performance art"



A tentative beginning ukemi from one of our promising new aikibujutsu students, Tohoru Masamune

"Aiki in Atlanta"



By Shawn Forristall

I am very excited to see Aiki getting more attention within the I.S.F. / Aiki Buken organization. I do not profess to be an expert on Aikido/Aikibujutsu but I do feel I am blessed to be able to learn and teach within the Aiki Buken. I am on a path that I was introduced to by Toshishiro Obata Kaiso when I first saw him at a seminar some 11 + years ago. At the time I had been studying a very hard style Karate-do under Sensei Mel Williams for a number of years.

Initially we added Shinkendo to our school as Sensei Mel Williams had always had a desire to train traditional Japanese Swordsmanship. I would like to thank Hanshi Paul Couch for introducing our school to Toshishiro Obata Kaiso. After a couple of years we witnessed Obata Kaiso's aiki skills hands on. I was amazed with how seemingly effortless Kaiso destroyed the will of the attacker.

I had seen many Aikido demonstrations prior to this and had taken aikido in college and was always impressed with the fluidity of movement and the high falls but I always wondered how the Aikido Experts would fair against a strong gedan mawashi geri from a well trained Karate practitioner with sound balance. If you have ever taken a quality low round house kick you know what I mean. So although interested in Aikido in the past I felt I was better off continuing my study of Karate.

(cont'd on next page)



Atlanta Budokan



Back Row: Merlin Tolstyk, Nayef Smith, Chris Nutter, Steve Goodwin
Middle Row: Vic Maffe, Kevin Mason, Bill Reynolds, Shawn Forristall Sensei, Jim Stratton, Kevin Appleton, Sam Long
Front Row: Magesh Krishnan, Randi Lamey, Nicolas Lamey, Eric Innis, Mary Giles, Laura Wilson, Carolyn McInturff

November 2003

But after seeing, and feeling!, Obata Kaiso's techniques I was enthralled. The power and control was not like anything I had ever seen or felt. I had been kicked and punched by many more people than I can remember but never had I felt so helpless, talk about an ego check!. It was obvious that once a confrontation began the attacker was one hundred percent under Kaiso's control. The attack could have been any kind of strike or grab but the outcome was predetermined by a true master. This is why I decided I not only wanted to train Aiki under Obata Kaiso but I needed to if I was going to continue to train any martial art. This is when we began our transition from a very hard style karate-do school to a member of the Aiki-Buken.

Although we no longer teach separate Karate classes I would not change the path I have taken to get where I am today. My karate-do training has strengthened my body and has helped me to develop a strong martial spirit. Most importantly it allowed me to learn under one of the finest people I have ever met, Sensei Mel Williams.

The thing I appreciate the most about the Aiki Buken is that Obata Kaiso does not expect you to forget about your prior training. Instead he allows you to utilize your background to develop your growth in aiki and Shinkendo. His only demand is that you train with a sincere spirit. This is the founding principle of the Atlanta Budokan and is the primary reason I feel the I.S.F. and Aiki Buken fits us so well.

Shawn Forristall
Atlanta Budokan

Aikido: Leadership not Pushership

by Randy Beard



Aikido is literally defined as: ai-harmonious, ki-energy, do-way. Sounds like a simple definition, unfortunately it's quite hard to understand as a way of life in or out of the dojo. Even the founder once said that "words and letters can never adequately describe Aikido, it's meaning is revealed only to those who are enlightened through hard training." So train hard and utilize this as a supplement to your training.

In my dojo, I tried to paste the words "whole body movement" on the ceiling

so when students took ukemi they would continually see it. Due to the concrete ceiling, the vinyl didn't stick very long; however, my students got the message. Leading control has been stated a lot of different ways, and *whole body movement* is my way of stating this important concept. The practice of tai sabaki does little good if that is the only time your body is moving. Most often students use the strength element to force Aikido to work. This mistake is a common nuisance in Aikido training.



In overcoming this hurdle, please remember the battlefield effectiveness of joint manipulation and throwing techniques are just that, effective. They will not fail you; you will fail them. This failure is related to non-movement of the body. Unbalancing the attacker or kuzushi is necessary for the execution to take place. No matter how it is done, either by blocking, passing, avoiding, or misdirecting, the continued motion must be used. This is *leadership*. If your movement stops during the execution, the kuzushi is then returned and a second attack or a reversal is inevitable. Continuing with the first movement, while standing still, will multiply the problem and therefore lead to even more frustration. Most often beginners are looking for immediate results, so after a technique is memorized, they stop moving and start to muscle their partner until they force the take down or injure their partner. This type of training is neither fun nor safe. This is *pushership*.



Leading control or whole body movement is applied because tai sabaki does not end with the interception or misdirection of the attack. After the attack is moved into the technique, then whole body movement is applied through the joint lock. This in turn allows the technique to execute control over your partner as it is intended. A common metaphor you here around our dojo goes like this, "if you car gets struck in the ditch, you can't shove it back on the highway with the strength of your arms, (muscling or pushership). You must apply whole body movement (tai sabaki) in conjunction with the spinning tires (technique) while helping to redirect the cars (cont'd next page)

(Aikido Leadership not Pushership, cont'd from prev page)

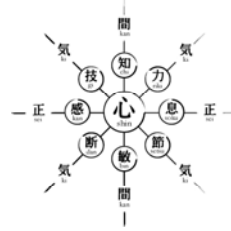
sideways movement thru the ditch (leadership) up the embankment and back on the highway. All elements working together overcome the problem of being stuck in the ditch (initial attack).

The flipside of this is when an attack is stopped in midstream and the defender must reach out and put the limb back in motion. Once again, this is *pushership* and is not effective training. Baseball pitchers throw the baseball thru the batters box. The catcher is beyond this area giving way to the batter allowing him to hit the baseball and lead it into the outfield. Therefore, effective attacking must also be an overall part of the training process. I'm sure you have all heard the statement that Aikido doesn't really work. In both types of these muscular scenarios, they are probably right-it won't work. Students end up injured or quitting before they can realize the power in Aikido.

If all goes well and students begin to understand this *whole body movement* (tai sabaki) during their practice, then training becomes more enjoyable. They see an increase in speed of execution and a harmonious blending of the attack. This is the "ai" in Aikido. The "ki" in Aikido is referred to as the yin/yang of energy. The negative aggression is joined with a positive response to direct an outcome you desire. The "do" in Aikido is the defensive strategy in your normal day to day interaction with friends, family, or strangers. This daily interaction is no longer an obstacle and Aikido can be executed as leadership. This in turn creates a blending with outside circumstances so you never stumble during the randori of life.



Kuyo Junikun: Applications of the Abstract Precepts



by Victoria Van Fleet

I had the chance to visit the dojo of Kushida Takashi sensei in Ann Arbor, Michigan last summer. I understood that Kushida sensei was a contemporary of Obata Kaiso, both having served as uchideshi under Shioda Gozo at the Yoshinkan. A friend of mine suggested that we drive the hour south to visit the Genyokan and I was happy to have the evening free to join him. Immediately upon our arrival, I sensed that *something* was happening. The dojo was a swarm with black-belted students who were in such an acute state of excitement, they didn't seem to notice that we were guests, that we didn't 'belong' or that we might be in need of some kind of navigational cues. After an awkward wait at the door, I pulled one aside. He directed us to a loft overlooking the dojo where we could view training and politely scurried away.

The Genyokan is a handsome dojo, though not too posh, tucked away in an industrial park. On the cream-colored canvas mat below, the fifty or so black and brown belted students---*this couldn't be a regular Thursday night training*---were forming neatly ranked lines with a military exactness.

"What's going on?" I whispered to my comrade.

"It looks like a demo, or something." We nodded to each other in agreed speculation.

A dark-suited man sitting next to us leaned over as politely as possible and whispered, "Inoue Kyoichi sensei of the Yoshinkan is here from Japan in honor of Kushida sensei's thirty-year anniversary in the United States." As I watched Kushida sensei's son, Akira, lead an immaculate presentation of the Genyokan's curriculum, I pondered on the significance of what I had found myself an unwitting witness to. I knew that Kushida sensei, as described in his own literature, had been dismissed from Yoshinkai Aikido in the early nineties when he deliberately refused to comply with the standards of the newly formed International Yoshinkai Aikido Federation. Tonight, Inoue Kyoichi, the chief instructor of the Yoshinkan, was here---*in Michigan*. The event seemed to be, at least implicitly, a gesture toward a sort of reconciliation. Just a gesture, mind you, a seed that might germinate into a new dialog to between bygone associates.

I was dumfounded by my luck. We just happened to visit the dojo on the evening that Inoue Kyoichi and Kushida Takashi were sharing the same room for the first time in well over a decade. Certainly, the evening was significant to these men and their respective schools, yet it felt significant to me too, in an odd way. I had never studied *Yoshinkai* or *Yoshokai* Aikido, yet there was a tread of commonality that seemed to connect me with these men at this, their reconciliatory moment: we all knew Kaiso Obata Toshishiro.

I was struck with the strange notion that I was obligated, by the coincidence of my attendance, to make an appropriate gesture of acknowledgment. I had no idea what such a gesture would be or any real idea as to what Kaiso's relationship was to these men, past or present. At this moment, all I could really do was intuit. (*cont'd on next page*)

(Kuyo Junikun, cont'd from previous page)

I have watched my sempai using their "*rokkan*" or intuition as a practical, if intangible tool to assess their situation and to determine the most appropriate course of action or "*dan*"---not that they want to, but Kaiso routinely puts them in situations where they *have* to rely on it. It takes a lot of guts to act deliberately and with confidence on what feels like a hunch or an educated guess, when you are not absolutely certain. I think this is why people only do it when there is no other recourse; we much prefer the reassurance and security of literal, exact instructions. I have noticed that there are occasions that Kaiso is deliberately inexplicit with his senior students, which forces them to use *rokkan* alongside deductive reasoning of experience or "*setsu*" in order to determine exactly what it is he expects of them at any given moment. At first I thought that Kaiso's sometimes scanty directions were due to 'being a man of few words' or maybe that he just didn't speak much English. Having since enjoyed some very pointed personal lectures, I know that he can express himself quite clearly when he has reason to. I am beginning to think that what I have observed is really a method of teaching intended to impart some of the more sophisticated aspects of budo as described in the Kuyo Junikun. I see the effect of this teaching in the impeccable attention (*kan*) of my sempai both on and around the mat. Because they don't always know what it is they will be expected to do from moment to moment, how they will be called on or when, they are always extremely attentive and observant of any detail that may provide an indication. This must be the proper mood of a samurai warrior: ready (*bin*), vigilant (*riki, shin*), and meticulously aware of their situation (*kan*). Thereby, they are well equipped to make decisive, accurate decisions (*dan*) and possess the confidence to execute those decisions without hesitation.

The summer heat and the humidity of exertion hung like a canopy over the dojo; the air in the loft was stifling. Obata Sensei was not here to tell me what I should do, and I had a hunch that I was supposed to do something. On the canvas below, the conclusive bows made way for a professional photographer. The Dojo-chos Inoue and Kushida were making a formal document in pictures. In a few well-rehearsed seconds, long tables were erected for a collective toast. *Now...this is the moment...but what?* I remembered the 2003 good luck charm I had received from Obata sensei; I always carried it in my wallet behind my driver's license. In a few seconds, I bounded down the stairs handing it to the nearest attendant.

"Please, send this card to Kushida sensei with good regards from Obata Toshishiro on the happy occasion of his anniversary," I blurted in a tumble of words. He nodded with urgency and disappeared into the crush of wet dogis. I felt a little stab of insecurity; acting on behalf of my teacher without his direct consent, on the basis of some abstract thing called *rokkan*; it was an exceptional and audacious position that I did not relish. I searched for fresh-air and relief of the nearest exit.

From behind, above the scuffle, I heard, "Excuse me!" Kushida Akira was working his way through the crowd of students waiting in the wings. "Did you send this card?"

I nodded. "I am a student of Obata sensei; I am here to bring his best regards and good luck to you and your family on this anniversary." (cont'd on page 9)



pre-tsuki Vicky at Honbu during her Christmas 2003 visit... any guesses? Battojutsu #3?

Aikido– from a new student's point of view



By Dennis Cheng from Honbu

I am writing this article to share the observation I have of the school, the people and the art from a new student's point of view.

I started my Aikido training around the last week of January 2004. It took about 2 weeks of searching for the right dojo before I decided to join the Aiki-buken honbu dojo at downtown Little Tokyo.

During my first visit to the dojo, I notice that the dojo setting is simple. Mats are clean and there plenty of them giving everyone plenty of space for their training. The emphasis of the school is in training and not ambience so unless you are dining or relaxing, then to me, these are low priority. I have been to places where the ambience is nice but there is not too much space to roll around. I actually observed a couple of students bump during training at another dojo.

During training, students teach each other and if you are willing to learn, you can ask anyone and if they know, they will teach you. There is not really any competition where someone might hide some waza from you or vice versa. Everybody seem to be progressing as a group (although at different levels). You switch partners plenty of time so you get the feel of who can do what and when.

Instructor ranking is somewhat important to me during my search although not in the priority list since they will not be instructor if they don't know what they are doing. After visiting this dojo, and doing research afterwards on the Internet about Sensei Obata, I was really surprise that he conducts the class every day (unless he is out of town). It is an opportunity for me to be taught by Sensei Obata. He is the Founder and Kaiso of the [Aikibujutsu Tanren Kenkyukai](#), Founder and Chief Instructor of the [Kokusai Toyama Ryu Renmei](#), and the Founder and Chief Instructor of the [International Shinkendo Federation](#). With credentials like that, there is no wonder that people from all over the United States crave for his instruction. One time, I run into a family of 4 that visited the dojo. They have to drive 900 miles to have private instruction with Sensei that weekend. And although they drove that far, they made it a point to stop by the dojo just to see Sensei and his students in action. After talking to them, I thought to myself, how lucky am I to have the opportunity to train with Sensei.

Today, as I continue training, I am beginning to notice some changes. Muscles that I don't know exist began to hurt for 2 days or more and as I go along, they heal more quickly. My ukemis are are getting better and better. I am learning different wazas (technique) and sure will learn a lot more in the future. I am looking forward to spending quite a bit of time at the dojo to better myself so I am just pacing myself with the learning.

[Ed: Dennis, though he's just started, is vying for Steve's uchi-deshi spot. He's got plans to help Honbu to finally get our mats to stop moving around! And Dennis gets his articles in on time. Steve... :)]

(Kuyo Junikun, cont'd from page 7)

"Thank you very much for coming; my father knows Obata sensei very well. I remember meeting him many years ago when I was still young." Akira was befittingly gracious. He had a strong, yet slight build and an infectious smile that was neatly offset by the humbleness of his white dogi. "Please, tell Obata sensei thank you and that my family sends him our good regards. We very much appreciate this and we have very good memory of him. I would like you to meet Jerome Helton. He also knows Obata sensei. He studied at the Yoshinkan."

Mr. Helton was a large, older gentleman in a gray beard and glasses. "Yes, I remember Obata sensei *very* well." His inflection implied more than his few words; something, but I'm not sure what. "So you are a student of Obata sensei." He studied me for a moment, almost incredulously. "Well, well, now. Very good!" Helton sensei handed me a tiny paper cup of sake as Akira dashed back to his father's table. In a collective salutary gesture, a little piece of Aikido history was made and I was fortunate enough to partake a tiny sip because I always carried Shinkendo's luck.

I told Obata sensei about my visit to the Genyokan and apologized for my presumption on his part. He never did make a direct comment, so I am left to my intuition and reasonable deductions to discern his opinion. Experience says that he is not liberal with affirmations, but quick to correct. I have observed that he seldom hands-out a generous affirmation to any elegant thing my sempai do, yet never misses an opportunity to make necessary "adjustments" should they deviate even slightly from his highest expectations. He told me once (actually, it was a little louder than that), "I am telling you what is wrong with your technique because that is what we need to work on! That doesn't mean that you don't have good techniques. We don't have time here to talk about all the good things--they don't need work--we only have time to work on the weakness!"

From this, I have learned that Obata sensei's approval is often expressed tacitly and what doesn't need fixing may not need to be discussed. I find assurance in the knowledge that he never neglects working on our weaknesses. Maybe this is why he seems to pay so little attention to the best of us.

--Victoria Van Fleet

The Sword of Aikido

By Ed Bergwerff

Aikido's founder Morihei Uyeshiba studied various sword, staff, and spear arts as well as empty hand arts during his early life. All of these experiences became the foundation of what later developed into Aikido.

It is documented that he held licenses in Shinkage-ryu from Sokaku Takeda and most likely trained in other ryu as well. This coupled with the historical and cultural importance of the sword in Japan at that time makes it easy to conclude that swordsmanship played an important role in the development of Aikido.

It was the direct application of sword maneuvers to empty hand movements that logistically requires the edge of the hand to work as a blade. When properly applied this hand blade or (tegatana in Japanese) allows the defender to receive, control, redirect an attack much in the same way an expert swordsman might deflect and parry another sword.

Generally tegatana commonly refers to the part of the hand reaching from the base of the little finger to the wrist, but in a broader sense could include the part of the arm from the elbow to the end of the hand.

Just as swordsmanship requires a strong connection of center or hips to the extended tip of the sword, Aikido requires the connection of center to the extended hand blade to redirect and blend with an attack.

A good example of the effective use of the hand blade could be found in a shomenuchi attack defended by iriminage.

Here the defender steps off line and deflects an overhead attack with his hand blade. He then steps behind and with his off hand takes control of the attackers balance breaking his center. The defender then executes a tenkan movement while at the same time cutting down on the attackers extended arm with his hand blade. As the attacker is drawn around his power is diminished and the defender executes a throw by cutting across the attacker and over his outside shoulder with his extended hand blade.

In conclusion, proper use of the hand blade is essential to the success of many of Aikido's techniques and it can be said that cross training and gaining knowledge would help greatly in understanding the application of tegatana the sword of Aikido.

“It’s All About The Love... Isn’t It?”

Daniel Cogan - Jade Tiger Dojo



Dan Cogan teaching Aikido Class

Aikido enjoys a unique place in the world of martial arts. In a world of violence and egotism, aikido attracts followers dedicated not only to self-improvement, but improvement of the world through their participation in it. In an environment of hostility and defensiveness, aikido promotes calmness; a relaxed approach to potential conflict, where defusing a situation is preferred to victory through submission.

Little wonder, then, that instructors and students alike can go astray in their passion and zeal for aikido. Sometimes good intentions replace good techniques. Sometimes good theories replace sound concepts. Sometimes, misguided ideas about what love is can lead to an art that forgets what it is and where it came from. And then, people misunderstand when they see their art applied seriously in its purest form. Aikido may well be “all about the love,” as many practitioners put it, but love needs to be defined properly, for this art to be appreciated properly.

Love should not be a vague, sappy emotion that leads to lazy, unfocused behavior. True love is active, concerned, nurturing, and sometimes, corrective. Love is about responsibility, loyalty, and commitment.

To truly embrace aikido, the aikidoka must love the art. This means several things. Firstly, there must be appreciation for the history and heritage of the art and its techniques. Recognition of its development is due. Although the art grows and evolves, it does have a history – to claim that the concepts and techniques are new is not love in its best form.

Secondly, there must be love for the people who passed this art on, who contributed to its development and survival over the years, ensuring that it remained vital and in practice. To not acknowledge their part in history, and pay them the respect that they deserve is selfish and short-sighted.

Thirdly, love encompasses how we deal with our training partners in the dojo. If we truly care for the other person, it is important to give them our best effort, to work hard to perform each technique seriously, and correctly, so that if they actually needed this technique to survive, it would work.

Finally, there should be love for those people who are not yet training, who are the future of aikido. They deserve to have access to viable techniques, and an organized system of self-defense with options that they can apply in a variety of situations.



Kim Saccomando performing Shihonage on Shaunesy Daly

These fundamental expressions of love are all found in the Aikibujutsu Tanren Kenkyukai. Obata Sensei carefully acknowledges and researches the historical development of aikido, and pays tribute to its instructors throughout its history. Students and instructors alike are given techniques that actually work in both the dojo and the real world; and this organization is set up to carry on the transmission of Samurai self-defense to the next generation and beyond.

So, in truth, aikido really is all about the love. Don’t let the perceived violence of our techniques fool you into thinking that we miss the point of aikido – our love and loyalty is real and compelling, as are our techniques.



Bowing out respectfully after a good training session. Now it’s time to clean that 1800 sq. ft. floor!

“An Answer For Everything”

Daniel Coglan - Jade Tiger Dojo



Pictured Above:
Sensei Dan Coglan teaching at the Jade Tiger Dojo

My irrepressible daughter sits on the couch next to me, poking at me, giggling. I'm trying to finish writing a demo, while she's tickling me, doing her level best to be a cute distraction. Finally, I brush her hand aside, return her wrist slightly (which tips her over on the couch), and tickle her silly with my other hand.

Twelve years earlier: an angry young man flicks open a large folding knife in Texas and attempts to stab with it. One reflexive brush block and one wrist return later, I stand over the assailant, his knife in my hand, backing down his two friends.

The technique performed in the two situations was the same – kotegaeshi. The attacker's intent was different in each case; hence there was a different application of the technique.

This is Aikido. Aikido is a martial art that is all about adaptability, being able to use techniques in a variety of ways, to fit varying circumstances. From roughly 20 basic principles come literally thousands of variations. An aikidoka's level of response is limited only to his/her level of training.

It is this adaptability that makes aikido unique in martial arts. Arts that are predominately striking based fail to allow for control situations: their reaction is to punch or kick in response to a perceived threat, even if that threat doesn't warrant a strike. Grappling arts often lack the means to effectively close distance- to “bridge the gap” from long range to short range, and pay a heavy price to get inside an attacker's guard.

So most people's answer is to cross-train. Cross training is sound if done properly, but truthfully, this is difficult to do. In many cases, martial arts systems are put together in a hodge-podge, non-systematic fashion. Long-range techniques and strategies are taken from one style; medium range from another, completely unrelated style; and then short-range techniques are thrown in; with no respect to stances, footwork, or basic concepts. There is then no seamless, flowing continuity to the system: the defender must not only “change gears” but change styles as the situation changes. This can lead to critical hesitation in a self-defense situation, with dire consequences.

Aikido, if taught and practiced properly, produces strong, flowing movements that are changed only to match the attacker's energy and intent; the concepts and fundamental techniques remain the same. When one adds weapons to the mix, and the responses still remain the same, the overall superiority of aikido becomes even clearer.

Training in aikido can be daunting: it seems so complicated and difficult at first, with so few short term rewards, that often people walk away early in their training, believing that it just isn't “combat effective enough.” The long-term effectiveness and adaptability of this comprehensive art, which also teaches strategies for diffusing potential situations (again, same concepts), and avoidance of problems, truly make it an answer for everything.



Pictured on right:
Michael Coglan performing Shihonage on his father.