



## It's Uke's Job to Harmonise – Discuss !

Aikido can be defined as "The Way of Harmony", that's a given.

But how is this translated in our practice ?

- What does this actually mean when Nage (defender) & Uke (attacker who then receives the technique) are working together to practice the Art of Aikido ?
- Should every Uke try to attack exactly the same, so that Nage can perform the same technique every time and each Uke can then all take Ukemi exactly the same.
- What is the trade-off with being able to practice safely in "Harmony" but also ensuring that the techniques are effective ?
- At what point does Uke actually look to "take" their breakfall ?
- Who's fault it is if Nage can't do the technique ?
- If we are in harmony with each other, surely there should be no reason for Uke to ever tap ?
- Who's fault is it if Uke gets hurt ?

I've been asked all of these questions and many more besides over the years and seen many different styles of Aikido where they have a different emphasis to Aikido Northampton.

I've come to understand that as much depends on a persons understanding what it means to be an Uke as it does for someone to understand how to perform Aikido techniques.

Also, we need to understand that being Nage and Uke can require different mindsets, even for each individual, so when we combine this with the number of students on the mat, there will inevitably be combinations of partners that require more work and understanding in order to achieve a harmonious Aikido relationship.

The following is an example of how a student could take one approach to being Uke and what it means to them. It's written as in the form of a student making statements which appear to sum up their understanding of being a good Uke and the inherent contradictions that seem to be evident.

*My comments and answers are then inserted in italics.*

I offer it as a introduction to new starters of Aikido, in order that they can hopefully gain some sort of understanding of why Aikido practitioners attack and fall the way they do. Also, it's an opportunity for people of any grade to review how they Uke for others and perhaps why others uke for them the way they do. I don't expect everyone to agree with everything here, but if it makes you reconsider your approach to aspects of Aikido, then surely that's not a bad thing is it? even if you carry on as before.

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### **As Uke, we should:**

Attack with intention and follow Nage's lead without resistance, which means maintaining your posture throughout so that you don't fall over unassisted and can reverse technique should Nage give that opportunity.

*You should place the committed attack, do not "try" to re-gain posture, if it is "given back" to you, accept it willingly. You are simulating an attack by someone*



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*who does not practice Aikido or is an "expert" in another striking martial art. If they are an "expert" – then the chances of them launching an un-provoked attack is minimal.*

*Obviously, if someone has already practiced another Martial Art, they will attack in the style of the other Art. This is neither to be encouraged or discouraged. As long as an attack is placed using the correct side (left or right) and is aimed at the correct target area, then all variations should be relevant and Nage needs to be able to defend themselves against them and all variations.*

Don't anticipate what Nage is going to do, accept their technique and follow it until they take your posture.

*Correct.*

*Attack with intention, with "beginners mind". This can still be done slowly it doesn't have to be fast.*

*In order to "take your posture" Nage does should not just have to move quicker than you and take you by surprise in a direction you cannot go. Nage should match your speed and intention (Harmonise with your attack) before continuing their technique.*

Don't pre-empt Nage by taking an ukemi before he has taken your posture.

*As you are allowing your posture to be taken, you should be able to flow with the technique and blend with any power (not strength) applied by Nage. Nage should be able to feel when your posture has been taken and also the fact that you are co-ordinating and not fighting with them*

#### **But at the same time Uke should :**

Give up your posture otherwise Nage can't do technique without hurting you.

*Do not "cling on" to your posture. Nage is attempting to take your posture in order to make the technique effective without incurring pain, but the technique can be applied either way. More power and more speed can be applied which makes it extremely difficult for Uke to take an ukemi – this is bordering on applied technique, but it needs to be understood that this is an option in a "real" situation.*

*In a "real" situation, there is no option to ask for the attack again and therefore Nage has to be able to apply a technique even if they are not 100% in the correct position or have Uke's posture. Let's not forget the "Martial" part of this Martial Art.*

*Ideally though, when Nage and Uke are comfortable working together and Nage is content that Uke is not fighting or pre-empting the technique in order to retain their posture, Nage will understand that if they do not have Uke's posture, it is due to Nage not blending with the attack or using and applying the other principles of Aikido correctly. In the some extreme cases, it may be that Nage is trying to force Uke to move in a direction they simply cannot go for a variety of reasons.*

If you get hurt, you must have been resisting technique or held your posture beyond the point at which you should have taken Ukemi.



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*If Uke is comfortable blending with the technique being applied and has been taught how to take Ukemi correctly, then Uke will be ready to "take" Ukemi at the earliest opportunity, which should correspond with the point that Nage is projecting in the case of Nage waza or pinning in the case of Katame waza. In these instances, Uke should not get hurt.*

*If Uke does get damaged in any way, even if Uke has not managed to comply with all the above, Nage has to take responsibility for the fact that their technique has caused damage. They may accidentally have moved in the wrong direction, applied too much power for Uke to co-ordinate with or mis-timed the application.*

*In short Nage and Uke take a 60 / 40 stake in a satisfactory outcome – in that ratio. Let's not forget, Uke is "lending" Nage their body for a while, they don't want it returned damaged!*

If Uke is blending with Nage's technique, then there will never be a need to "tap out" as Uke will always be able to take an Ukemi.

*At any point during the application of a technique, Uke has the option to "tap out". At that point Nage should immediately stop, release or lessen the technique.*

*Whilst in some classes Uke will always blend and co-ordinate with Nage, Nage also has the option to control Uke to the point that Uke cannot get out of the way of a technique and does indeed feel the application e.g. various wrist locks etc.*

*Practice such as this must be restricted to those students of a sufficient grade that they can benefit from this form of practice, but I feel it is essential for Nage to be able to understand how to apply a technique on someone other than a willing partner and also to be able to control how a person can react to their technique, offering no escape route. It is in these cases that Uke may well need to "tap out".*

*This is not to be confused with an egotistical desire to show that Nage can damage Uke, remember at the point Uke taps, the technique is released.*

If they do not find a result where they expect it, Nage may crank it on harder and faster so the technique escalates rapidly beyond their control.

*At no point should Nage apply any technique with a disregard for Uke's ability to react and take Ukemi in a safe manner. If this happens, it means that ego's on one or both sides have been employed (or thought by the other to have been employed) and a mis-communication has taken place.*

*If at any point you feel this is the case, please speak to the your partner or the class instructor, either at that point in time or when you feel comfortable in doing so.*

Nage's technique can take you into positions in which you cannot protect yourself.

*Nage should be able to protect Uke at all points, irrespective of whether Uke can protect themselves.*



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*This is why one of the principles taught at Aikido Northampton is that of Nage keeping control of their posture at all times, therefore they should be able to stop at technique mid flow or indeed stop Uke being forced to take an ukemi should the need arise.*

#### **Conclusion:**

We must be aware of the cul-de-sacs/points of no return and ensure your position at all times is one from which you can take Ukemi.

*Also be comfortable that you trust Nage enough to give yourself to the technique. The cul-de-sacs then become less.*

This will require anticipating what Nage is going to do and pre-empting it.

*Do not pre-empt. Beginners mind and coordinating with the technique and being ready to take Ukemi when the opportunity arises should mean that trust and not a clash of egos is created.*

Assume that Nage will expect a certain response from you. Anticipate what he expects.

*Dependant upon Nage's grade, they should not be "expecting" a response from Uke, they should be blending with Uke in such a way that the outcome of the technique is what they are aiming at, but the route there may be different, dependant on the feedback received during technique e.g.. do not try to go against power, redirect it.*

*Nage should not be trying to copy exactly what he has done before or what he has just seen. This will be purely robotic and not flowing or harmonious.*

*Anyone expecting a response from Uke is falling into the trap of believing that they able to perform a technique irrespective of Uke, or to put it another way, they can simply apply the technique "to" or "on" Uke. They may well get this to work, at least some of the time and satisfy their ego's in the dojo, but I have grave concerns that this may not work in the "real world" and they may end up swinging from a limb – in more ways than one.*

*They should be applying the technique "with" Uke, this is how wonderful Aikido is created.*

Assume that Nage will not/cannot protect you.

*Nage's aim should be to take control of uke's posture and not damage them.*

Plan your exit strategy before you attack, so that your movement coincides with Nage's expectation and that you can take Ukemi in comfort irrespective of him.

*Nage's ability to blend with Uke's attack and apply the technique safely will depend on their grade and their (possibly subconscious) interpretation of how Uke is going react to the technique.*

Commonly, these conclusions are interpreted as falling over for Nage, having a pilot's licence, taking a dive, or being an aiki-bunny (one move from Nage and you go to ground).



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*Pre-empting a technique and proactively Ukeing have a place. This is normally when teaching a lower grade where they should be moving or how they should be moving you. The degree of proactive Ukeing can then be reduced as Nage's understanding increases.*

*Being a compliant Uke and following the guidelines outlined above, is completely different to (and not to be confused with) donating your posture to the THSWLECFPaFLA Charity (Tree Hugging, Sandle Wearing, Lentil Eating, Caffeine Free, Peace and Free Love Aikido Charity), which is a large and seemingly growing organisation.*

*Whilst postures can be donated and are readily accepted in this charitable exchange, there is no reciprocal arrangement, whereupon, in receipt of your kind donation, you then automatically receive full knowledge of how to effectively "take" some-ones posture who doesn't want you to have it, because then have already have made a regular donation to the IGTFYO "I'm going to f\*\*k you over" organisation. Members of this latter organisation, do not normally frequent Aikido Dojos, instead they prefer to opt for more realistic encounters.*

So, to finally sum all this up :-

- As Uke you must :-
  - Respect Nage
  - Place a committed attack with "beginners mind"
  - Allow your posture to be taken, but do not give it away
  - Blend with the power and directions applied via the technique
  - Take an Ukemi at the earliest opportunity, but do not anticipate
  - Respect yourself
- As Nage you must :-
  - Respect Uke
  - Blend with Uke's attack and perform your technique "with" not "on" Uke
  - Be aware of when you are not in control of either Uke's or your own posture
  - Perform effective techniques, but protect Uke and allow them to protect themselves
  - Respect yourself