

# Aikido's Inside Secret



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by  
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On various occasions, usually at seminars, the three secrets of aikido are related. These are: blend with your partner's energy, break their balance, maintain and exercise impeccable posture. This paper submits that there is another aikido secret that is instrumental in maximizing the results when the three previously mentioned secrets are applied.

Aikido is a unique martial art in that its' practitioners not only strive to defend themselves from attack, but to protect the person trying to harm them. Their ability to keep from harming the attacker is predicated on the ability to protect themselves. If they cannot do this, how can they keep from resorting to the same level as their assailant?

The first rule of protection that is taught in exercises such as tai no henko is "get off the line". A variation of this is "taking the line". Each of these positions relative to the attacker (uke) acknowledges the importance of a line that runs from the center of uke's intent to the center of the person being attacked (nage). Getting off the line allows nage some time before the

next relationship is established or allows them to direct energy to uke from a safer position. Taking the line involves a commitment on nage's part of redirecting uke as they attempt to complete their attack.

Whichever technique nage chooses to use, they must utilize the inside secret to successfully complete the movement. The inside secret is to control uke's shoulder that is closest to nage. Every technique requires nage to control uke's inside shoulder in order to make the technique effective or to keep uke from attacking with the outside hand or fist. In the rest of this paper, examples will be given how each technique relies on controlling the inside shoulder in order for the technique to be effective.

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## **Ikkyo**

As the "first technique", the principle of controlling the inside shoulder of uke must be established here if it is to be true in other techniques. It is common for beginners to try and move uke's body by moving uke's arm. A frequent form followed is for nage to extend uke's arm straight up or out and try to take uke's balance by pushing the arm away from nage.



In most cases, nage runs out of extension and uke does not lose their balance. The problem is that when uke's arm is straight, ki, energy and physical connection do not flow through uke's balance point.

The most successful form of ikkyo will have nage entering close to uke's body. As nage causes uke's hand to rise, the hand is following an upward spiral. This causes uke's inside shoulder to turn away from nage. Instead of straightening uke's arm, nage allows the arm to bend as nage's inside hand presses on the upper backside of uke's arm between the midpoint of the biceps and the elbow. This is applied with a rotary motion that causes uke's shoulder to pivot forward. Two things are accomplished by this connection. The first is that uke is prevented from striking a blow with the off hand. The second is that uke's body will pitch forward and they will lose their balance. From this point, nage will be able to exploit uke's weakness and bring them to a pinning position.

The technique works because of the connection from nage to uke through the inside shoulder. In the turning version of ikkyo, the same form is followed in shaping uke's arm. When nage begins to tip uke forward, nage moves their rear foot in a wide backward circle. This moves the falling point for uke in a spiral with the inside

shoulder again serving as the connection point that controls uke's ability to counter attack and causes them to follow the moving fall point.

The pin in ikkyo is extended through the biceps of uke with the inside hand blade while the outside hand holds uke's wrist to the mat. This keeps uke's inside shoulder on the mat and keeps them from being able to roll over or rise to their feet.

## **Nikkyo**

Nikkyo oomote waza is very close to ikkyo in the way it is executed. Again, the inside shoulder of uke must be controlled. Uke is blocked from using the off side hand to grab or hit and as the inside shoulder is rotated by nage, uke's balance is tipped forward. The nikkyo pin depends entirely on the inside shoulder of uke being contained with ki aligned with nage's spine and ki flowing towards the earth. There are other elements of the pin such as taking uke's hand toward his ear but the key to keeping uke on the mat is to keep his inside shoulder down.



In nikkyo ura waza, as nage moves to the outside of uke's attack he attaches himself to uke's attacking wrist as uke turns to hit or grab with the off side hand. When uke comes back at nage, nage has already connected uke's hand to nage's clavicle pocket. Nage then rotates uke's wrist by drawing uke to him. The inside shoulder of uke is the conduit for nage's ki. If nage positions himself too far to the front side of the inside shoulder, uke will be able to reach nage with an atemi. The inside shoulder is again critical in protecting nage from uke's counter attack.

The ura waza pin begins with nage extending force through uke's captured arm causing uke to follow the descending spiral nage is making as he pivots to the ground. The inside shoulder is the connection that draws uke forward in this spiral.



Again, the nikkyo pin is accomplished by keeping uke's inside shoulder controlled with ki and force flowing down to earth. This prevents uke from being able to rise from the mat or roll their body over.

## **Sankyo**

When using the oomote version of sankyo, it would seem that the twisting of uke's captured wrist would be credited with being what makes sankyo work. This may be a highly motivating factor in how uke reacts to having the technique applied but it is not the key ingredient to a successful application of the technique.



Nage must gain a certain amount of tension in uke's wrist for sankyo to work properly. As in the case of ikkyo and nikkyo, the inside shoulder is kept between nage and uke thereby preventing uke from being able to counter attack with strikes or grabs with the outside hand. As nage applies pressure to the captured wrist, uke relieves the pressure by retreating backwards. This allows nage to step to the front of uke and while keeping sankyo on, extend ukes hand out to the side. This takes uke's balance, which is further destroyed as nage uses their inside hand to rotate uke's inside shoulder at the end of the biceps near the elbow as would be done when applying ikkyo. This rotation of the shoulder to take uke's balance makes ikkyo and sankyo similar.



When a standing sankyo pin is applied, the twisting motion is applied through the inside shoulder of uke. This motion combined with the balanced application of weight and ki makes it impossible for uke to lift himself from the ground. A kneeling sankyo pin utilizes the same downward spiral to keep uke's shoulder grounded but uke's hand is held close to nage's body while the sankyo grip is maintained by the outside hand and arm. This allows torque to be applied to uke's arm when nage turns his body trunk. At the same time, nage can lower their center for a more effective pin.

## **Yonkyo**

Using the ikkyo oomote waza initial blend, the yonkyo grip is applied while the forearm of uke is held parallel to his body trunk and over the back. This position makes it possible for nage to keep uke's center of balance extended beyond uke's feet. Nage uses the inside shoulder of uke to keep uke in this position while the yonkyo grip is applied.



Yonkyo tips uke forward by extending force and ki through the elbow of the arm being held by nage. Although nage is concentrating on guiding uke's elbow like the tip of a sword, uke's inside shoulder is affected by the movement of uke's elbow. This causes uke to lose their balance in the forward direction where they are taken to the mat and pinned. The yonkyo pin keeps uke's elbow from moving which keeps uke's inside shoulder on the mat.

When yonkyo ura waza is the appropriate technique, after the transition is made from the ikkyo ura waza blend to the yonkyo ura waza grip, uke is lifted by nage applying upward force and ki through uke's forearm and through his elbow. Nage keeps uke's elbow over his head until uke tries to regain his balance by turning back in nage's direction. Nage then uses the attachment to uke's arm to apply yonkyo. Uke is guided in a downward spiral until contact is made with the ground or mat. Pressure is kept on uke's inside forearm to keep uke's elbow pinned to the mat. Again, the inside shoulder is the connection point to the rest of the body.

As before, this position keeps uke in an unbalanced position where their inside shoulder prevents them from raising the rest of their body. In the spiral motion, the

leading elbow pulls the inside shoulder behind it and thus the rest of uke's body.

## **Kote Gaeshi**

After nage has grabbed the backside of uke's attacking hand, it is important to keep uke's inside shoulder between nage and uke's off side hand. A simple matter of keeping nage's inside elbow low and applying a forward kokyu movement will help keep uke from "turning the corner" and striking nage.



As nage steps back to engage the "helping hand", they must step back far enough to keep uke from being able to reach the head or body as uke falls. Control of the inside shoulder in the way that kote gaeshi is applied will keep uke from being able to keep their balance long enough to deliver an atemi.

After uke is taken to the ground, the inside elbow is used to rotate uke from their backside to their front side. This is a spiral motion that is similar to that used in ikkyo

when uke is tipped forward with the rotation of their shoulder. In this case, the rotation causes uke to turn over.

Uke is kept on their stomach as the pin is applied from either a standing or kneeling position. The arm of uke is kept in an upright position as in nikkyo and sankyo pins. Pressure is exerted down the arm to the inside shoulder of uke keeping them from being able to regain a standing position.

## Irimi Nage

Although there are several versions of a basic irimi throw, nage should always position themselves behind the inside shoulder of uke after the initial blend is made with uke's attack. When nage is in this position, they are able to move in either direction that uke might turn. They can also block uke from turning and striking nage by keeping either elbow in check.



A favored style of irimi nage is one where nage grabs uke's gi on the top of the inside shoulder. With this version of the technique, nage is able to both press down on uke

and to tilt their balance outside of uke's base. It is now easy to throw uke to the rear since uke is not able to keep their balance or gain a base where they could be strong and resist the throw.

## **Kokyu Nage**

When uke chooses tsuki for an attack, one option nage has as a response is kokyu nage. In kokyu nage, nage grasps the striking hand with their opposite hand, i.e. right to right or left to left. Nage then turns tenkan to the outside of uke's attack and places their inside arm under uke's armpit.



Again, this movement blocks uke's inside shoulder and prevents them from turning into nage and from being able to strike nage with the off side hand. At the same time, nage steps forward with their inside leg and with an arm arched outward extending kokyu. This propels uke away using the underside of uke's inside shoulder as a

contact point.

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## Conclusion

This paper is not meant as a comprehensive review of every aikido technique from every possible attack. Its purpose is to point out to the reader the importance in self-defense of controlling the inside shoulder of the attacker. There may be techniques where uke is unbalanced or pinned with a method other than by using or engaging the inside shoulder. However, the inside shoulder is an important consideration to be aware of in many aikido techniques and situations. As pointed out in this paper, it can be used for control, protection, shielding, to unbalance and pin.

The inside shoulder of uke is often close to the common pivot point established between uke and nage as an attack/defense situation unfolds. As such, it is to nage's advantage to have uke's shoulder outside uke's balance base. When this is the case, uke will have to compensate in some manner and this gives nage an advantage. When uke makes their adjustment, nage can exploit the opening that is created. There are, of course, other body parts and habits on which nage can focus during a technique that will help maximize the effectiveness of their efforts. Some generate power, such as the hips. Some help with balance, such as the heels and soles. Some help focus ki, such as fingertips and hanmi direction. The inside shoulder of uke however, is seldom discussed as such a consistent point of importance. Nage should constantly be aware of this feature and be consistent in applying the advantage to be gained by controlling the inside shoulder. They should be vigilant in searching for techniques where it is a dominant factor in deciding the outcome of the application of the technique. After all, what is the use of having an inside secret if you don't use it?

Having learned where these situations arise, and having used them in practice, it becomes an integrated part of successfully completing a technique with maximum effectiveness and efficiency such as occurs when an aikidoist blends with their partner, breaks their balance and maintains impeccable posture.

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