

**Mental Preparation for Piano Performance Using Principles of Aikido**

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**ABSTRACT**

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Although much has been written about Music Performance Anxiety (MPA), very few of its many definitions and treatments can be holistically applied. Indeed, there is only limited reference to MPA in the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders [DMS-IV TR (text revision)].<sup>1</sup> Broadly speaking, "MPA is considered a product of the interaction between fearful thought, autonomic arousal, and behavioral responses to a perceived threat,"<sup>2</sup> a "debilitating stress that has probably been around for as long as there have been musicians."<sup>3</sup> For these reasons, this thesis looks for answers in ancient wisdom, the Shinto<sup>4</sup> and Zen bases of the Japanese martial art of Aikido, which directly translates to "The

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<sup>1</sup> Myron Ross Thurber, "Effects of Heart-rate Variability Biofeedback Training and Emotional Regulation on Music Performance Anxiety," (dissertation, University of North Texas, 2006), 1, quoting P. G. Salmon, "A psychological perspective on musical performance anxiety: a review of the literature," *Medical Problems of Performing Artists*, 5(1) (March 1990), 2-11.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Thurber, 1, quoting Brodsky, W., "Music performance anxiety reconceptualized: A critique of current research practices and findings," *Medical Problems of Performing Artists*, 11 (3) (September 1996): 88-98., D. B. Clark, & W. S. Agras, "The assessment and treatment of performance anxiety in musicians," *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, 148 (5) (May 1991): 598-605., W. J. Cox & J. Kenardy, "Performance anxiety, social phobia, and setting effects in instrumental music students," *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 7 (1993): 49-60., M. Fishbein, S. E. Middlestadt, V. Ottati, S. Straus & A. Ellis, "Medical problems among ICSOM musicians: Overview of a national survey," *Medical Problems of Performing Artists*, 3 (1) (1988): 1-8., A. M. McGinnis & L. S. Milling, "Psychological treatment of musical performance anxiety: Current status and future directions," *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 42 (3) (2005): 357-373., E. A. Plaut, "Psychotherapy of performance anxiety," *Medical Problems of Performing Artists*, 5 (3) (March 1990): 58-63., J. Sareen & M. Stein, "A review of the epidemiology and approaches to the treatment of social anxiety disorders," *Drugs*, 59 (3) (March 2000): 497-509., and A. Steptoe, "Negative emotions in music making: The problem of performance anxiety," in P. N. Justin & J. A. Sloboda, eds., *Music and emotion: theory and research* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Shinto ("the way of the *Kami*") is the name of the formal state religion of Japan that was first used in the 6th century C.E., although the roots of the religion go back to at least the 6th century B.C.E. Shinto has no founder, no official sacred texts, and no formalized system of doctrine. Shinto has been formative in developing uniquely Japanese attitudes and sensitivities, creating a distinct Japanese consciousness. Belief in *kami*—sacred or divine beings, although also understood to be spiritual essences—is one of the foundations of Shinto. Shinto understands that the *kami* not only exist as spiritual beings, but also in nature; they are within mountains, trees, rivers, and even geographical regions. In this sense, the *kami* are not like the all-powerful divine beings found in Western religion, but the abstract creative forces in nature. Related to the *kami* is the understanding that the Shinto followers are supposed to live in harmony and peaceful coexistence with both nature and other human beings. This has enabled Shinto to exist in harmony with other religious traditions. As the foundation for Japanese culture, Shinto has also played a

Way of Harmony,” for an innovative step-by-step approach to literally take the mental and physical violence out of MPA. Aikido is the refinement of a centuries-old quest to effectively deal with perceived internal and external threats - fear, anxiety, and ego - in an effort to reach a Zen state of awareness through its practice in everyday life. This holistic approach to the unification of mind and body through training is a way of disconnecting the threat of MPA to achieve optimal musical performance.

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significant role in the political realm. For centuries, Shinto religious festivals and ceremonies have become indistinguishable from the affairs of the government.  
<http://www.patheos.com/Library/Shinto>

## DEDICATION

I wish to dedicate this work to the memory of the founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba, whose teachings have transformed my life and music. This thesis is the result of that continuing transformation, which I wholly expect to last a lifetime.

April 26, 2016



“Aikido is not for correcting others, but for correcting one’s own mind.”

— Morihei Ueshiba, Aikido Founder, 1883-1968

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I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to Professor Craig Sheppard for his help, guidance, and encouragement not only for forwarding my music study at the University of Washington, but also in guiding the dissertation process to its final conclusion. His abiding passion for piano performance has been nothing less than inspirational.

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Words are insufficient for expressing how grateful I am to my former piano professor in Hiroshima: Kyoko Sato encouraged me to study in the United States after earning my master's degree 19 years ago. Since then, she has become my mentor in life as in music. My personal growth and professional development would not have been possible without her. I simply cannot offer enough thanks.

I am also very appreciative of all my previous instructors, especially my very first teacher, Machiko Takahara, who was followed by the talented Masayo Terashita, Yoshiko

Iwanaga, Futaba Inoue and Veronica Jochum. Their influence over the years has allowed me to reach my most demanding academic goals.

I also wish to thank my Aikido classmates and instructors at Isshin Ryu Aikido: Cevin Jacobson, Dylan Moore and Darren Leahy, who train with me three days a week. At Jisso-kai Aikido, I'd like to thank instructors Bernie Lau and Kanjin Cederman, who encourage me to explore *Jujutsu* by sharing their art with me. At Shohei Juku Aikido Canada & Sunshine Coast, I'd like to acknowledge instructors Tamami Nakashimada and Russ Qureshi, who inspire me through the art of the great *Sensei* (teacher) Morito Suganuma, who gave me the approval to use his exercises in this thesis. I share with them their love and joy of Aikido.

Words are again insufficient and fail to describe how much my father, Kaoru Makiyama, and my mother, Ayako Makiyama, who passed in April 2015, have meant to me. As parents, you motivated me to play the piano at age three, provided essential roots, and supported my art and life's work. You always encouraged me to grow into whatever it was I wanted to become. I also want to thank my multi-talented brother for showing me the 'never give up' spirit through his own achievement. I feel your unconditional love every day of my life.

Finally, I offer my heartfelt appreciation to my Aikido *sensei* Russell Jacobson. This study would not have occurred without him. His passion for Aikido opened me up to the

spiritual, evolutionary path of Aiki piano, where Aikido and the art of piano performance converge and improve one another.

感謝の気持ちを込めて。

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## **Note**

Throughout this paper, the reader will see Japanese words and phrases appearing in italics. This is because there are often no English equivalents. I have tried to provide both the literal meaning, as well as an explanation of the depth of the philosophy behind each word, for they are the culmination of ancient wisdom refined over the millennia.

The specialized nature of this dissertation has also necessitated the use of a number of Japanese terms particular to Aikido. These terms appear italicized throughout the presentation. Japanese terms are defined in the text on first occurrence or in footnotes. Final responsibility for the accuracy of translations and editing decisions rests with me.

Finally, the application of the Aikido principles in this paper is limited to musical performance anxiety in the solo pianist.

## **Genesis of A Thesis: A Personal Account**

“You have a serious problem as a pianist. When you spaced out and suddenly stopped playing, you completely lost the flow of the music! You shouldn’t have stopped no matter what! You must keep playing!”

This critical judgement by the chair of the piano department at the Elisabeth University of Music in Japan following a juried performance stunned me. Her tone was even more threatening: I thought I would have no future as a concert pianist. Even worse, my critic was right, and I knew it.

While I understood the importance of keeping the musical flow regardless of what happens on stage - all the more so since piano performance is a time-based art - I couldn’t understand why hours upon hours of preparation didn’t harness the problem. This was likely because the random memory slips happened at unpredictable places in the music: there was simply no way to prepare for them no matter what I did. Onstage, it felt like my mind had nothing to do with my body. While my fingers plinked away at the notes as if on autopilot, my random thoughts - the conscious and unconscious dread of losing control - ran away with my performance. It felt like I didn’t have any control over my body, which, in turn, resulted in a loss of initiative and the will to power through to the end of my concert. No matter what I did, I couldn't keep the negative cognitions at bay. Adding to my woes: I felt I was alone in this fear because there were neither classes nor instructions on how to specifically address musical performance anxiety (MPA) at the university; stage fright was something I had to figure out completely on my own. This led to no small degree of self-loathing as the purpose of my practice became less and less about the music and more and more about fighting memory slips. My quest to eliminate the shaky spots as much as possible developed into an obsession; I searched in vain for methods of perfect memorization and couldn’t sleep the night before a performance.

As the enjoyment of practicing and performing drifted away, I became ever more fearful, almost giving up my musical career. After concluding that performance anxiety was untreatable, my well-meaning friends and colleagues didn't skimp on advice: Keep performing to overcome stage fright, analyze the music to access a deeper understanding of it, engage in breathing exercises before a concert, visualize a great performance in the past and apply the imagery during meditation, do Yoga, and on and on...nothing made a significant difference.

Following a disastrous piano concerto in 1997, a close friend introduced me to the book, "Mental Toughness Training for Sports: Achieving Athletic Excellence" by James E. Loehr, a world-renowned performance psychologist. This book opened my eyes to the concept of the mind-body unification and the mental toughness it takes to get to what he called, "the Ideal Performance State (IPS)." According to Loehr, IPS helps athletes access their latent potential - skills sets as yet unrealized - to get excellent results. His argument focuses on the importance of mental training to realize peak performance and concludes that anyone can attain an IPS state through a combination of visualization, self-motivation, meditation, energy generation, concentration, stress release, discipline in positive thought processes and attitudes, mental and physical relaxation, and calmness under pressure at critical times. After employing Loehr's techniques, a survey of coaches revealed that at least fifty percent of their past successful experiences were realized by psychological factors related to mental toughness, while athletes said it was the factor in seventy to ninety percent of their best performances.<sup>5</sup>

Although I understood Loehr's point, it was difficult to apply his work to my piano performance anxiety without him. I needed a systematic exploration into the interrelationships of my physical and psychological states, something only attainable under the direction of an expert. That said, Loehr's book gave me hope where none had previously existed. When I began

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<sup>5</sup> James E. Loehr, *Mental Toughness Training for Sports: Achieving Athletic Excellence* (New York: Penguin Group, 1986), 17.

concentrating on my excellent performances instead of the poor ones, I realized I'd reached IPS moments when the music flowed from my mind through my body to my hands in a supremely comfortable and harmonious way. That's when I began to really think about how to harness these unique moments reliably during a performance. Remarkably, I felt my self-loathing begin to ebb with the flow of a profound sense of renewed hope and desire.

This "enlightenment" was further induced after a friend visited me in the greenroom following a performance. "Your arms looked like they were dancing above the keyboard. It was like choreography," she said. Since I never paid attention to how I looked while I performed, her comments made me think. I began to review my physical gestures and soon realized that matching them to the music was beneficial, because it helped train my mind to think about what my body was doing. By designing appropriate types of physical gestures to benefit my musical expressions, i.e., breathing, posture, facial expression, wrist angle and movement, as well as the height, rotation, finger touch and stroke, I began feeling more in control while performing. In this way, I trained myself to hear and feel precisely what I wanted before producing a sound by simply allowing my body to move along with my selected gestural idea. This method also made me feel a stronger sense of direction as my focus shifted fluidly from the present to the next moment during a performance. For instance, I breathed in before the new phrase started, adjusting the speed and depth of the inhalation - quickly or slowly, shallowly or deeply, according to the character and the amount of space between phrases. I began thinking that this method might be a cure for my performance anxiety — a crucial discovery.

This profound sense of hope opened me up and welcomed me back to my Japanese heritage, which has long prized the unity of mind and body for a healthy, peaceful, balanced and fulfilled existence. To this end, I started Aikido training in May 2012 under Russell Jacobson, who has a 5<sup>th</sup> degree black belt in Aikido. Although I'd been interested in Aikido, which translates into "The Way of Harmony" (as well as "The Way of Love"), it wasn't my first

priority until I met my *Sensei* (teacher), who, over time, would instruct me on its real meaning. Aikido 合気道 is formed of three *Kanji*<sup>6</sup> characters. *Ai* 合 means harmony, unity or love; *ki* 気 represents the spirit, life force or universal creative energy; and *dō* 道 is a Zen philosophy of discipline and means “the way” or “the path” to enlightenment. [This is why so many words having to do with the Japanese arts end in *dō*, as in *Kadō* (the Way of Flowers), *Sadō* (the Way of Tea), *Kendō* (the Way of the Sword), *Judō* (Gentle Way), *Kyūdō* (the Way of Archery), and *Kodō* (the Way of Fragrance)].

In retrospect, I had only modest hope that Aikido, due to its ancient Zen and Shinto<sup>7</sup> spiritual bases, would alleviate my MPA. And yet, with time, and under my *sensei*'s direction, I learned that Aikido embodies the refinement of a truly ancient mission to deal with internal and external fear in the effort to reach a Zen state of awareness that, in turn, would nullify MPA and lead to optimal musical performance. Indeed, Aikido employs antagonistic training situations on the mat as a way to expose inefficient body movements as products of a disquieted mind. In other words, the martial art teaches that without the experience of conflict, we cannot know harmony; this is the duality of existence (the Yin and the Yang) and one Aikido addresses better than any other art form. Simply speaking, Aikido is about transforming negatives into positives in the mind of the practitioner. It does this through repetition and practice that reveals where mental and physical conflicts exist in the body before uniting them as one.

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<sup>6</sup> *Kanji*: “The adopted logographic Chinese characters (hànzì) that are used in the modern Japanese writing system along with hiragana and katakana.” <https://www.google.com/search?q=kanji&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8>

<sup>7</sup> Shinto (“the way of the *Kami*”) is the name of the formal state religion of Japan that was first used in the 6th century C.E., although the roots of the religion go back to at least the 6th century B.C.E. Shinto has no founder, no official sacred texts, and no formalized system of doctrine. Shinto has been formative in developing uniquely Japanese attitudes and sensitivities, creating a distinct Japanese consciousness. Belief in *kami*—sacred or divine beings, although also understood to be spiritual essences—is one of the foundations of Shinto. Shinto understands that the *kami* not only exist as spiritual beings, but also in nature; they are within mountains, trees, rivers, and even geographical regions. In this sense, the *kami* are not like the all-powerful divine beings found in Western religion, but the abstract creative forces in nature. Related to the *kami* is the understanding that the Shinto followers are supposed to live in harmony and peaceful coexistence with both nature and other human beings. This has enabled Shinto to exist in harmony with other religious traditions. As the foundation for Japanese culture, Shinto has also played a significant role in the political realm. For centuries, Shinto religious festivals and ceremonies have become indistinguishable from the affairs of the government. <http://www.patheos.com/Library/Shinto>

Aikido's holistic and step-by-step approach (application model) to neutralizing the impact of fear (in my case, MPA) is what is missing in the thousands of pages of research papers and theses related to this topic. After a review of the published material, I couldn't find one thesis that offered more than an attempted accounting, limited definition or band-aid approach to MPA: The studies mostly sought to categorize the problem as a neuroses, a social phobia,<sup>8</sup> a social problem,<sup>9</sup> or an anxiety disorder<sup>10</sup> in need of prescription drugs, biofeedback, yoga, meditation, and other therapies (Jungian, Freudian, and on and on...). What's more, a survey of musicians themselves by scholar Mary L. Wolfe suggested the use of 478 "coping strategies,"<sup>11</sup> underscoring the need for a more holistic approach. Even more importantly, none of the studies offered ways to access, address and treat the individual experience — something that I discovered (after almost two decades of searching for the definitive "cure") was only available through Aikido training.

## The Awakening

Aikido training is first and foremost about the development of the Aiki body,<sup>12</sup> which is the basic physical condition crucial to training. It requires total body relaxation and flexibility (especially in the hip), as well as the centeredness of *hara*.<sup>13</sup> I noticed right away that my body was not as flexible as I thought. I had way too much excess tension in my lower back, torso, shoulders, arms, and hands — all the parts employed during piano practice and performance. What's more, because I'm right-handed, the right side of my body, especially right shoulder and arm, tended to deploy all of my muscle strength. During class, my *sensei* pointed out that

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<sup>8</sup> Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fourth Edition, Text Revision, American Psychiatric Association, 2000, 456.

<sup>9</sup> D. Riley Nicholson, Meghan W. Cody, and J. Gayle Beck, "Anxiety in musicians: On and off stage," *Psychology of Music* (2014): 1.

<sup>10</sup> Sadullah Serkan Seker, "The Validity and Reliability of the Musical Performance Anxiety Scale," *European Scientific Journal*, 11:34, (December, 2015): 49-54.

<sup>11</sup> Tess Anissa Miller, "Why did it Sound Better in The Practice Room? A Guide to Music Performance Anxiety and How to Cope with It Through Journal Writing," (dissertation, Michigan State University, 2004), 41.

<sup>12</sup> The basic physical condition that is crucial to Aikido training. It requires the total body relaxation, flexibility, especially in hip, and the centeredness in *hara* without losing the fullness in a sense of balanced body structure.

stiffness in these areas disturbed my ability to move naturally and efficiently and undeniably impacted my piano performance. This lack of balance between left and right sides of my body is something Aikido addresses better than any other martial art by building physical awareness of movement, not only during training, but also in daily life, including when I practice piano.

My awakening - or breakthrough - in Aikido came one day after several hours of training. Since I am the only woman at the *dojo* (school), I always felt overwhelmed by the feeling of unfairness between female and male physical structures and strength. Because of that feeling, I tried to match my male partners' power. It was like having a physical argument — a conflict. When I went into fighting mode, it made training increasingly difficult and injury inevitable: The more frustrated and angry I got, the more my body lost its flexibility and my mind lost its control. Obviously, I didn't know how Aikido worked. As its founder, Morihei Ueshiba (December 14, 1883 - April 26, 1969), wrote, "Aikido is not for correcting others, but for correcting one's own mind."<sup>14</sup>

In other words, I needed to change myself and my approach, to adapt to the unreasonableness, and let go of my negative emotions. Ueshiba's point was eye-opening to me, because my first image of the Japanese martial arts was about fighting, which I thought required rigid movements using muscle strength. In fact, the opposite is true: The point is to stay connected with the training partner and use his energy to subdue an attack. This requires proper breathing and a clear mind in order to fill the body with *ki*,<sup>15</sup> to keep the strong sense of centeredness in *hara*, and to remain relaxed both mentally and physically.

And so, one day, instead of activating my aggression and attempting to move my partner with strength, I did the opposite: I kept my mind clear, secured my posture and centeredness,

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<sup>13</sup> *Hara* is located between the navel and the pubic bone, on the center line, two finger widths under navel, is the foundation of Aikido movements, since *hara* is considered the generator of vital energy.

<sup>14</sup> The Memoir of the Master by Morihei Ueshiba. <http://www.aikiweb.com/general/memoir.html>

breathed in through my nose, and exhaled through my mouth as I deflected my training partner's attack, blending our energy streams and throwing him to the ground. The first time I experienced it, I couldn't believe what had just happened, especially since it occurred so unexpectedly — so incredibly effortlessly. All we could do was collapse on the floor and laugh; there was no negative feeling left. This awakening experience during Aikido training made me think, 'What if I apply this method of resolving conflict to my performance anxiety?'

This is how my thesis came into being, a journey that is evolving into not only a life-long passion, but a book that can be shared with other musicians facing the same internal demons. For I truly believe that the process of becoming an artist, be it in Aikido or music, is one and the same. No one put forth that idea better than Seiseki Abe (1915-2011), a master of the Japanese art of calligraphy and a disciple of Aikido's founder:

“Aikido is ultimately not really about twisting wrists, causing pain, or throwing people; it is about cultivating *ki*, which is something distinctly different from these things. The same is true of calligraphy. There are five or ten thousand characters we can brush in learning about form and line, but ultimately we are pursuing something beyond these, and that something is none other than *ki*. So calligraphy and Aikido became the exact same pursuit for me and I began to practice both as hard as I could.”<sup>16</sup>

This speaks to the quality in Japanese art: *haba* (breadth) and *fukami* (depth), which are cultivated by refining the artistic sensibility through the cultivation of *ki* as the common denominator that unifies the physical, psychological and spiritual self and dispenses with the fear that accompanies ego and limits creativity. Thus, as a pianist, I assert that Aikido training is just as beneficial and compatible as Seiseki Abe realized, helping to refine my musicality as I overcome my fear and anxiety to reach optimal performance.

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<sup>15</sup> *Chi* in Chinese. Energy. Intention. Vital energy.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Seiseki Abe (2), by Stanley Pranin Aikido Journal #114 (1998) 4 – Influence of Aikido on calligraphy. <http://blog.aikidojournal.com/2011/11/06/interview-with-seiseki-abe-2-by-stanley-pranin/>

This has become my new “Way of Harmony.” I am aware that we have our own personal experiences, i.e., that one solution doesn’t work perfectly for everyone. However, I strongly hope that my thoughts and experiences, including my struggle and excitement with evolving myself along the Aikido path shared in this paper - and later in my book on the topic - will encourage pianists and assist in their personal transformations. To that end, this thesis gives readers a step-by-step introduction to achieving optimal performance using Aikido principles and practice techniques.

## Historical Overview: Morihei Ueshiba and the Foundations of Aikido

Much of what is understood about Aikido is the result of oral history, a series of talks by its founder Morihei Ueshiba, which were transcribed and edited by Hideo Takahashi and published in Japanese under the title *Takemusu Aiki*. This spiritual text provides the basis for understanding how Aikido might help relieve MPA in an effort to achieve optimal musical performance. For, although Aikido is a Japanese Martial Art, Ueshiba insisted that its practitioners *never* incite violence: “The desire to attack is proof that one lacks the confidence to emerge victorious. That is, one has already been defeated in spirit.”<sup>17</sup>

This idea of being “defeated in spirit” is something most - if not all - pianists can identify within themselves because it's exactly how one feels after a failed performance. Amidst the mass of research on MPA, which centers on arriving at its definition, proving how wide spread it is within the musical community, and finding cures and treatments, the idea of “defeated in spirit” rings truest, which is why Ueshiba banned the word “enemy” from the Aikido vocabulary and created a path “centered on daily training with other kindred souls, mutually working together to polish and refine their individual characters.”<sup>18</sup>

Ueshiba came by his pacifism the hard way. From his birth in 1883 to his death in 1969, he would experience the rebirth of the imperialism from the end of the Shoguns, the Sino-Japanese War, the Invasion of Taiwan, the Russo-Japanese War, WWI, WWII and the atomic bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, the American occupation of Japan, and the blossoming of a post-war democracy. Along the way, he would earn the nickname “The Soldier God” for his prowess, leadership and bravery in the field of duty, renounce violence, ban the word “enemy,” and finally earn the honorific title *Ōsensei*,<sup>19</sup> the supreme teacher. This

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<sup>17</sup> Morihei Ueshiba, *The Heart of Aikido: The Philosophy of Takemusu Aiki* (New York: Kodansha USA, Inc., 2010), 16.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Or *O'Sensei*. It means “the grand teacher” or “the venerable teacher.”

amazingly long and spiritual life was not pre-ordained, especially for a slight man who stood under 5'2" tall.

Ueshiba was born to a wealthy land-owning family on December 14, 1883 in Tanabe, Wakayama Prefecture, Japan, just after the end of the Tokugawa Shogunate. His father, Yoroku Ueshiba, was a businessman, trader (lumber and fish) and politician with a keen interest in the martial arts. His mother, Yuki, a cultured and very religious person, was distantly related to the Takeda clan, one of the greatest of the old *samurai* families. The only son among five children, Ueshiba came into the world prematurely and would remain small, sickly and physically weak throughout most of his teenage years. A quick study, he was, however, deeply intelligent, with a penchant for mathematics and physics, and noted for his fine memory. His early education took place at a local Buddhist temple of the *Shingon Mikkyo* sect, where he learned reading, writing, and mathematics, discovered an inherited appreciation of his father's interest in the martial arts and his mother's love of poetry, art and religion, learning to chant the sacred mantras and scriptures of esoteric Buddhism, especially the *Shingon* incantations.

Morihei Ueshiba's desire of his physically challenged youth, of wanting to be strong for his family and his countrymen, probably intensified his early attraction to the martial arts. But one night, in particular, would become the first stepping stone onto his future path. According to Morihei's son, Kisshomaru Ueshiba, a gang of thieves (by some accounts, members of the political opposition)<sup>20</sup> broke into the house and beat Yoroku with great violence. "I wished at that time that I could have helped my father. I didn't know what to do,"<sup>21</sup> said the deeply chagrined man who would become *Ōsensei*.

After his early Buddhist and secondary schooling, Morihei graduated from the Abacus school with superior marks while still a teen and got a job as an auditor at the local tax office,

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<sup>20</sup> John Stevens, *Aikido; the Way of Harmony* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1984), 3.

which he subsequently quit after the passage of an unfair tax law, siding with protesting local fishermen and revealing early signs of an interest in the poor.

By 1901, Ueshiba decided to work in a business operated by his relatives, the Inoue family, in Tokyo, moving to the capital city after he turned seventeen. During his time in Tokyo, his attraction to the Japanese martial arts grew as his interest in business waned. He studied *Tenjin Shinyo Ryu Jujutsu*<sup>22</sup> under Tokusaburo Tozawa (1848-1912), but, less than a year after arriving, he had to leave Tokyo after falling ill with beriberi, a thiamine deficiency (vitamin B1) that can result in a loss of feeling and muscle function, mental confusion, increased heart rate, shortness of breath and swelling in the lower legs. His poor health forced a return to his native Tanabe, where, after recovery, he married his childhood friend, Hatsu Itogawa.

By 1903, at the age of 20, Ueshiba was, once again, restless and sought to enlist in the military; he was immediately rejected because he did not meet the minimum height requirement of 1.56 meters (about 5'1.5"). After the disappointment, he returned home and set off into the mountains to do all sorts of stretching and hanging exercises in the woods in order to gain the necessary half-inch to join the military. In late December of 1903, he reapplied and got accepted into the Thirty-seventh Battalion Osaka's Fourth Division. During this time (less than four years), Ueshiba became well-known for his work ethic, leadership, physical feats and toughness, and expert his skill with the sword and the bayonet, reaching the rank of sergeant.

His experiences in war clearly established his life direction. During the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), he was in Manchuria (a deadly battleground) for eighteen months. His bravery and sense of calm during his military service and successful encounters on the battlefield earned him the nickname of the "the soldier god." He claimed that when he got close enough, he could

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<sup>21</sup> William Gleason, *The Spiritual Foundations of Aikido* (Rochester: Inner Traditions / Bear & Co., 1995), 7.

<sup>22</sup> Meaning "Divine True Willow School" classified as a traditional school (*koryū*) of jujutsu. It was founded by Iso Mataemon Ryūkansai Minamoto no Masatari in the 1830s.

see the path of the enemy's bullets — a flash of light just before the bullet hit its mark. The bullet, he said, would follow the path of that light and if he dodged the flash of the light, the bullet would miss him. This was the first evidence of Ueshiba's extrasensory ability: dodging a barrage of gunfire.

Ueshiba left the army and returned to Japan in 1906. While in the army from 1904 to 1908, he trained *Yagyū Shingan Ryu Jujutsu*<sup>23</sup> under Masakatsu Nakai (1891-1908)<sup>24</sup> in Osaka (starting around 1904) and on an occasional basis after his discharge, receiving a teaching license in 1908. At his father's behest, he gave up the opportunity to enter the prestigious Toyama officers' school for professional soldiers and returned home once more, sacrificing his will to his Yoroku's wishes. This did not turn out well. Ueshiba began to act strangely, engaging in Buddhist and Shintoist ascetic practices, such as fasts and days alone in the mountains, purifying himself in icy waterfalls and stormy seas, and, in general, causing his family grave concerned. He seemed to be desperately seeking a new direction in life, and found it after connecting to Minakata Kumagusu (1867-1941),<sup>25</sup> a noted biologist who lived in his hometown. Ueshiba supported Kumagusu's environmental and religious convictions and opposed the *Meiji* government's plan to consolidate and eliminate thousands of small *Shinto* shrines in order to develop the land. With a righteous mind and a good deal of indignation, Ueshiba took action, petitioning officials, writing protest letters to newspapers, and organizing demonstrations. His son, Kisshomaru, would later recall that his father's role in this movement was "warrior general."

Ueshiba's interest in national politics grew through his involvement in this affair. And so, at the beginning of 1911, Ueshiba's father sought to influence and re-focus his son's energies by

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<sup>23</sup> Morihei Ueshiba received the rank of *Shoden* from a *Shihan* of the *Edo*-line of *Yagyū Shingan-ryū* stemming from the sixth lineal-headmaster, Goto Saburō.

<sup>24</sup> Stanley Pranin, *Aikido Pioneers - Prewar Era Interviews conducted by Stanley Pranin* (Aiki News, 2010), 5. There is some uncertainty over whether Ueshiba was actually taught by Nakai, or by Masanosuke Tsuboi, one of Nakai's students. It may have been that the formal name of the tradition was actually *Goto-ha Shingan Ryu*.

<sup>25</sup> A Japanese author, biologist and naturalist.

setting up and opening a local *dojo*, hiring Kiyochi Takagi (1894-1972), a *Kodokan Judo* master, to teach his son. This would last until 1912, when the Japanese government announced the beginning of the Hokkaido Project, encouraging people to settle in the northernmost, uninhabited area of the Hokkaido Island in order to serve Japan's future food needs and protect the land from Russians, who were interested in its strategic location (and still are to this day). Ueshiba decided to relocate his family to the village of Shirataki, in Monbetsu County, Hokkaido, along with eighty other people from fifty-four households, who wanted to live as farmers. The pioneer spirit of "creating something out of nothing" fired up Ueshiba, who became the leader of the *Kishu* settlement group. He worked as a coordinator, supporter, provider, and guardian, establishing himself as the undisputed leader - one called, "King of Shirataki" - and leading the group through the adversity of harsh winters and life in the wilderness.

Ueshiba would spend seven years in Hokkaido, from 1912 to the end of 1919. It was during this time that he met Sokaku Takeda (1859-1943), a master of *Daito Ryu Aiki Jujutsu*,<sup>26</sup> at the Hisada Inn in Engaru, Kitami Province, Hokkaido, in late February 1915, and started training under him. (This would be one of the most crucial events in the history of Aikido, since the art of *Daito Ryu Aiki Jujutsu* is its primary technical influence among the other Japanese martial arts<sup>27</sup> in which Ueshiba trained.) Although the 20-year relationship between Sokaku Takeda and Morihei Ueshiba is often viewed as problematic, with misunderstandings, biases, and recriminations to this day, it is clear that there was a great deal of mutual respect between the two men. Indeed, it is difficult to find a movement in Aikido, which does not originate in *Daito Ryu Aiki Jujutsu*.<sup>28</sup> But that is where the similarity ends since, to this day, the substance of

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<sup>26</sup> The continuation of a martial tradition of the Aizu Clan dating back several hundred years. *Daito Ryu Aiki Jujutsu* was propagated in many areas of Japan during the *Meiji*, *Taisho*, and early *Showa* periods by the famous martial artist, Sokaku Takeda. Known equally for his martial prowess and severity of character, Takeda had used his skills in life-and-death encounters on more than one occasion.

<sup>27</sup> *Shinkage Ryu Jujutsu*, *Sousei Ryu Jujutsu*, *Yagyū Ryu Jujutsu*, *Hozoin Ryu Sojutsu*, and modern *Jukendo*.

<sup>28</sup> Stanley Pranin, *Aiki News* #94, Winter/Spring 1993—Morihei Ueshiba & Sokaku Takeda.  
<http://omlc.org/aikido/talk/osensei/bio/mori1.html>

Aikido has nothing to do with what Sokaku Takeda taught Morihei.<sup>29</sup> This interview below is what Ueshiba (shown as O sensei<sup>30</sup>) has to say on the matter:

**B:** Did you discover Aikido while you were learning *Daito Ryu* under Sokaku Takeda?

**O Sensei (Morihei Ueshiba):** No. It would be more accurate to say that Takeda Sensei opened my eyes to *Budo*.

**A:** Then were there any special circumstances surrounding your discovery of Aikido?

**O Sensei:** Yes. It happened this way. My father became critically ill in 1918. I requested leave from Takeda Sensei and set out for my home. On my way home, I was told that if you went to Ayabe near Kyoto and dedicated a prayer then any disease would be cured. So, I went there and met Deguchi Onisaburo. Afterwards, when I arrived home, I learned that my father was already dead. Even though I had met Deguchi only once, I decided to move to Ayabe with my family and I ended up staying until the latter part of the *Taisho* period (around 1925). Yes . . . at that time I was about 40 years old. One day I was drying myself off by the well. Suddenly, a cascade of blinding golden flashes came down from the sky enveloping my body. Then immediately my body became larger and larger, attaining the size of the entire universe. While overwhelmed by this experience, I suddenly realized that one should not think of trying to win. The form of *Budo* must be love. One should live in love. This is Aikido and this is the old form of the posture in *Kenjutsu*. After this realization, I was overjoyed and could not hold back the tears.<sup>31</sup>

The first thing that one notices in this interview (1957) is that Morihei Ueshiba told that his encounter with Onizaburo Deguchi (1871-1948), the second spiritual leader of the *Omoto Kyo*<sup>32</sup> religious movement in Japan, was the key to discovering Aikido. Deguchi was a master of

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<sup>29</sup> Koich Tohei, *Tenpu Nakamura and Morihei Ueshiba, Kinokakuritsu* (Tokyo: Keizai Shinpo Sha, 1999), 62.

<sup>30</sup> Or *O'Sensei*. It means "the grand teacher" or "the venerable teacher."

<sup>31</sup> This interview was conducted by two unnamed newspapermen, appeared in the Japanese-language text. Aikido by Kisshomaru Ueshiba, Tokyo, Kowado, 1957, pages 198-219. It was translated from the Japanese by Stanley Pranin and Katsuaki Terasawa. <http://aikidocommunity.org.au/aikido-unleashed/founder-aikido/>

<sup>32</sup> "The Teaching of the Great Origin" A sect founded in 1892 by Deguchi Nao (1836–1918), often categorized as a new Japanese religion originated from *Shinto*.

the spiritual practice called *chin kon kishin*, a Way of Communication with the Divine Spirit of *Kami*/God through concentrated meditation. After hearing about Deguchi's charisma, the impulsive Ueshiba visited him in Ayabe on his way home to ask for prayers to his ill father. Ueshiba understood Deguchi's words, "It's all right for him," as meaning that there was nothing to be anxious about with regard to his father. But upon his return to his hometown of Tanabe, Ueshiba learned that his father had passed away: The final words for his son were, "Live your life freely and accomplish whatever you wish."

Ueshiba was going to move back home with his family to succeed his father as a patriarch and teach at *Daito Ryu Aiki Jujutsu*, but apparently it didn't happen before his father's death. Suffering deep sorrow and regretting that he wasn't at his father's deathbed, Ueshiba spent the next weeks and months in prayers and meditation. Thereafter, he decided that since the meeting with Deguchi was so impactful, he would move his family to Ayabe and enter the religious life of *Omoto Kyo* in the spring of 1920. This year was the most challenging year in his life, going through his father's passing, abandoning his home in Tanabe to move to Ayabe, and losing both of his sons to illness. In the next year, 1921, his son, Kisshomaru was born, an event that lifted Ueshiba's spirits.

Deguchi was the first to recognize Ueshiba's outstanding potential abilities both as a spiritual leader as well as a martial artist. Their relationship had a significant impact on the spiritual growth of Ueshiba and the humanitarian aspects of Aikido. Deguchi told Ueshiba that his mission was to develop a new martial art, one that would aid mankind. Deguchi realized that Ueshiba's purpose on earth was to teach the true meaning of *Budo*: an end to all fighting and contention. For the next eight years, Ueshiba served as Deguchi's assistant, named his art *Aiki Bujutsu*,<sup>33</sup> taught at the *Ueshiba Juku dojo*<sup>34</sup> (built in his private residence near the *Omoto Kyo*

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<sup>33</sup> The blending of spirit based on classical martial movement. *Jutsu* is technique, as opposed to *do*, which is a path or way. The name Aikido was used after 1942. Before that the art was called *Kobukan Budo*, *Aikijutsu*, *Aiki Ryu*, *Aiki Budo*, and other such things. Subsequently, the names *Tenshin Aikido* and *Takemusu Aikido* were also used.

<sup>34</sup> Ueshiba Academy

headquarters), headed up the local fire brigade, led the self-sufficient life of a farmer, and studied the doctrines of *Omoto Kyo*, especially *chin kon kishin*<sup>35</sup> and *kotodama*<sup>36</sup> — the spiritual function of the vibration of sound.

During this period, Ueshiba had been cultivating the foundation of Aikido: the unification of spirit, mind, and body. In 1922, Sokaku Takeda, the founder of a school of *jujutsu* known as *Daito Ryu Aiki Jujutsu*,<sup>37</sup> visited Ueshiba in Ayabe with his family, remaining for five months to teach Ueshiba and members of the *Ueshiba Juku dojo*. At the end of his stay, Takeda awarded Ueshiba the *kyoju dairi menkyo*: a substitute teaching certificate that conferred upon him official status as an instructor of *Daito Ryu Aiki Jujutsu*. Deguchi, who disapproved of Takeda's arrival at the scene, advised Ueshiba to start his own tradition instead of being a successor of *Daito Ryu Aiki Jujutsu*, since the methods of *Daito Ryu Aiki Jujutsu* were too combat-oriented and could not manifest the true meaning of *Budo*: the spirit of love and protection for all things.

In February of 1924, Ueshiba was one of few selected companions to accompany Deguchi to Mongolia in search of a place to establish a utopian community to be called a *Heavenly Kingdom on Earth*. A pacifist, Deguchi believed that once the great spiritual traditions of Asia were united, the rest of the world could be organized into an association of love and brotherhood under his direction. This vision was based on the idea that all teachings evolved from a single origin. Unfortunately, the party became embroiled in the political destabilization of the region and was surrounded by armed bandits and soldiers. Ueshiba's mysterious ability to

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<sup>35</sup> A Way of communication with the Divine Spirit of Kami/God through concentrated meditation.

<sup>36</sup> Morihei Ueshiba, *The Heart of Aikido*, 39. It became a key aspect in Ueshiba's search for the true spirit of *Budo*. His eight years at Ayabe is believed as the crucial time for his spiritual development, and he studied Shinto philosophy from Onizaburo Deguchi and mastered the concept of *kotodama* (also *otodama*). *Otodama*, the first word "*oto*" means sound, and the second word "*dama* (or *tama*)" means spirit, meaning the "Spirit of the Sound;" is a long-held *Shinto* religious belief that sound is living and that there is meaning in sound. The same as with *kotodama*, "*koto*" means words, "Spirit of words," is believed that because the words are living and influential, paying extra attention to what kind of words/sounds to be delivered is advised. Pianists' deep consideration of tone colors, timing, length, dynamics, implication, expression to each tone is a practice of *otodama*. Their sensitivity in producing sound is a practice of *otodama*.

<sup>37</sup> The continuation of a martial tradition of the *Aizu Clan* dating back several hundred years. *Daito Ryu Aiki Jujutsu* was propagated in many areas of Japan during the *Meiji*, *Taisho*, and early *Showa* periods by the famous martial artist, Sokaku

dodge a barrage of gunfire<sup>38</sup> presented itself again with some of his students bearing witness. Ueshiba would describe the situation as follows: “Before the opponent could pull the trigger, his intention to kill would form into a ball of spiritual light and fly at me. If I evaded this ball of light, no bullet could touch me.”<sup>39</sup>

The Deguchi party was captured, held as prisoners by the Chinese military, and taken to an execution site to be shot. After a last minute intervention by the Japanese consul in Mongolia, they were released and returned to Japan in July of 1924. Thereafter, Ueshiba trained much more intensely in his effort to establish the new style of his *Budo*. For instance, he commanded his disciples, who were armed with *shinken*<sup>40</sup> to cut him in half (obviously without success). He practiced day and night, mastering the spear and utilizing his own methods of physical training and *misogi*<sup>41</sup> (spiritual purification). His martial skill reached an almost superhuman quality after intense practice. His spiritual enlightenment in 1925, described in the interview above, was the moment of the discovery of the missing aspect in his ideal *Budo*: the spirit of love and protection for all things. It is useful to quote from Ueshiba’s own words on what the true *Budo* means to him.

The traditional *Budo* has not come to completion yet. *Budo* in the past was for the period of physical constitution. That time was necessary for us to strengthen the foundation. We should not pursue only the world that is visible to our eyes, because that creates never-ending conflicts. We need to manifest the world that is invisible to the eyes to achieve a world in unity. This is the completion of the true *Budo*. The *Budo* in the past was about friction between things (to make a solid and refined foundation). Now we need to let go the past and rest our souls on that foundation. Without a spirit of love, we can’t accomplish our great mission of universal humanity. Attitude of love is *Seigan no Kamae*: a mental set with unclouded eyes and clear mind.

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Takeda. Known equally for his martial prowess and severity of character, Takeda had used his skills in life-and-death encounters on more than one occasion.

<sup>38</sup> Gozo Shioda, *Aikido, My Spiritual Journey* (New York: Kodansha USA, Inc., 2013), 151-154. Gozo Shioda said, “This is also something that I personally saw with my own eyes.” Mitsugi Saotome, *Aikido and the Harmony of Nature* (Shambhala Publications, Inc. 1993), 10.

<sup>39</sup> Saotome, 10.

<sup>40</sup> live swords

<sup>41</sup> The ritual of purifying oneself

Truth is intangible. People who practice Japanese *Budo* should not make enemies. The secret of *Bu* is not about forms.<sup>42</sup>

Morihei Ueshiba

The connection between Ueshiba's involvement in *Omoto Kyo* and the growing maturity and later founding of Aikido is clearly evidenced by Koichi Tohei (1920-2011),<sup>43</sup> an early disciple, and Shingo Suzuki, a former chief instructor of *Kodokan Judo* and childhood friend. Both men appreciated Ueshiba's skillfulness and began training under him. Tohei said that Ueshiba was an alchemist seeking the true meaning of *Budo*, and Deguchi showed him the path to that answer, allowing him to master the relaxed state of mind and body, called *shizentai*,<sup>44</sup> that is essential to Aikido.

Although the *Ueshiba Juku*<sup>45</sup> in Ayabe was open only for *Omoto Kyo* believers, its fame spread in *Budo* world, and many nonbelievers, mostly military soldiers, applied for admission. Thus, Ueshiba spent most of 1925 and 1926 in Tokyo, teaching his style of *jujutsu* to a number of influential people, including Admiral Isamu Takeshita and former prime minister Gombei Yamamoto, eventually moving his family to the capital city in 1927. Due to the rising number of applicants, Ueshiba moved to a larger piece of land in the Ushigome district of Shinjuku Ward, Tokyo, where the formal dojo (named Kobukan) and his residence were to be built. During this time period (around 1930), Jigoro Kano (1860-1938), the founder of *Judo*, came to visit Ueshiba at his Mejirodai Dojo and remarked: "This is the ideal martial art that I had in mind. This is true Judo." Kano immediately dispatched two of his own disciples to train with

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<sup>42</sup> Kisshomaru Ueshiba, *Aiki Shinzui*, 154. Translated by the author. Technically *Seigan no Kamae* is a middle guard sword posture with *kissaki* (a point of sword) pointed at the opponent's eyes in *Kenjutsu* (swordsmanship.) By pointing the *kissaki* at the opponent's eyes you make it difficult to judge the length of the blade, and may be able to trick your opponent in his distance from you. In this context, Morihei's use of these words is more philosophical. It means that when you face the opponent, see things with your heart instead of eyes, since things that are visible to your eyes trap your mind. It's important to see with your heart to gain a broad perspective to see its substance. There is the quotation that has the similar meaning of *Seigan no Kamae*. It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye. Antoine de Saint-Exupery (1900-1944)

<sup>43</sup> The only student of Morihei Ueshiba to be officially awarded tenth dan and a figure of central importance in the post-war aikido world.

<sup>44</sup> Tohei, *Tenpu Namkamura and Morihei Ueshiba*, 62-68.

<sup>45</sup> A small 18-tatami-mat *dojo* built by Ueshiba.

Ueshiba in order to best improve Aikido and Judo. In April, 1931, the Kobukan *dojo* was complete, and a year later, the Society for the Promotion of Martial Arts, an *Omoto Kyo*-affiliated organization, was founded (with Ueshiba as the lead instructor) to promote his martial art on a national and international scale. It was not easy to become Ueshiba's students at that time: It required recommendations from two reliable sponsors. He taught many influential people, leaders in all categories: military, government, business, education, and art, and through these connections, he instructed the police force and those connected with the Imperial Court. Since training was so intense and disciplined, the *dojo* was called "*dojo* of hell." It was about this time that students such as Gozo Shioda (1915-1994), Rinjiro Shirata (1912-1993) and others joined the *dojo*.

In December, 1935, the so-called Second *Omoto* Incident, a government intervention to suppress *Omoto Kyo*, broke out, leaving its headquarters destroyed and its leaders in captivity. Ueshiba was almost arrested; from then on he maintained a distance from the activities of *Omoto Kyo* in order to remain as a martial arts instructor at various military institutions.

Up to the outbreak of the Second World War, Ueshiba was extremely busy teaching, becoming well-known throughout the country and spawning many *dojo* branches in Tokyo, Osaka, and Kyoto. But the war soon emptied the *dojos* of students, as Ueshiba became increasingly troubled by the disparity between his ideas of world cooperation and the actual state of the affairs. This dissonance reached its apex in 1943, when the Army Ministry of Japan asked him to instruct soldiers in *Aiki-ken/Aiki* sword<sup>46</sup> after a survey clearly showed that the best soldiers were mostly Aikido practitioners. Ueshiba became furious by the request and refused to comply:

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<sup>46</sup> The name given specifically to the set of Japanese sword techniques practiced according to the principles of Aikido, taught first by Morihei Ueshiba (Aikido's founder), then further developed by Morihiro Saito, one of Ueshiba's most prominent students. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aiki-ken>

“Cutting someone down is a mortal sin. However, because this is a war, that is unavoidable. Although this situation came out from the patriotic spirit and innocent heart, if I teach *Aiki no Ken* — *Aiki* sword, for the purpose of killing enemies, all of our Japanese people would become demons. This would result in the end of this country. I had a gut-wrenching anger. I thought I would rather be ill (than saying yes or no), then I became ill for real.”<sup>47</sup>

This statement of Morihei Ueshiba (1883-1968) shows one of the most crucial moments in his life as a founder of Aikido. Even though the intention of saying no was purely about protecting his country, that rejection would have meant war-time disloyalty. However, the fact that he became deadly ill after the request made his answer clear without offering his official rejection to the Army Ministry. From this point forward he made the firmest resolution on the direction of Aikido: the path toward the principle of non-resistance - no competition, no enemy, no antagonism, no violence toward anyone or anything - would manifest a spirit of “loving protection for all things.” This resolution was the turning point that marked Aikido’s path apart from the other Japanese martial arts. As Ueshiba said:

“Harmony, love, and courtesy are essential to true *Budo*, but the people who are in power these days are only interested in playing with weapons. They misrepresent *Budo* as a tool for power struggles, violence, and destruction, and they want to use me toward this end. I’m tired of this stupidity. I have no intention of allowing myself to become their tool. I see no other way but to go into retreat.”<sup>48</sup>

Ueshiba went even further, saying that when humans allow all egoism to evaporate, they purify and attain a spiritual state of selflessness, resulting in an astonishing force arising from within. He strongly suggested the beneficial usage of that force in a constructive manner instead of a destructive direction such in war. After this, Ueshiba’s the word ‘enemy’ and its concept disappeared from his teaching forever, even though it was still during the war time:

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<sup>47</sup> The Morihei Ueshiba’s episode described by Hiroshi Tada, a Japanese Aikido teacher holding the rank of 9th dan in the Aikikai. Translated by the author. *Nihon no Shintai*,

<sup>48</sup> Saotome, 11.

“The universal world of peace and harmony is manifested by harmonization of heaven and earth. *Aiki* is the love that connects not only humans, but also whole creation together.”<sup>49</sup>

Prompted by a divine command (as Ueshiba described), he left the Kobukan *dojo* in the hands of his son, Kisshomaru, and moved with his wife to Iwama in Ibaraki Prefecture to retire and look after his health. He obviously foresaw that the war would not end well for Japan and hoped that his *Budo* would become the creed of a new era. During and after the Second World War, Ueshiba devoted himself to farming, practicing, studying, and supervising the construction of the *Aiki Shrine* and *Shuren dojo*. Prior to this relocation, his style was called *Aiki-jutsu*, then *Aiki-budo*. During this time, he also formulated the concept of *Takemusu Aiki*,<sup>50</sup> which represents Aikido’s highest form of mastery. The highest goal of Aikido is to keep producing a synergy effect with the circulation of life-generating force: the spirit of love. Iwama could be called the birthplace of modern Aikido, “The Way of Harmony.”

On August 14, 1945, Japan surrendered to the Allies, known as Victory Over Japan, and marked the end of World War II. For Japan, it was the beginning of a long road to recovery for a shattered country. Ueshiba was confident that Aikido would flourish and offer mental and spiritual sustenance to a wounded people. In 1948, while Japan was recovering from the chaos of war, the Aikikai Foundation was formed to promote Aikido in Japan and around the world; its first director was Ueshiba’s son, Kisshomaru. Until that time, the General Headquarters of the American Occupation had prohibited all teaching and training of *Budo*. Ueshiba was almost detained for alleged ties to war criminal activities as a combat instructor. However, after a United Nations military police search, no evidence was found, and Aikido was allowed to resume its active role in the restoration.

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<sup>49</sup> Kisshomaru Ueshiba, *Aiki Shinzui* (Tokyo: Yahata Shoten, 2002), 47. Translated by the author.

<sup>50</sup> *Takemusu Aiki* is Morihei Ueshiba’s vision of how the ultimate martial art should be, how his aikido should be, an art which harmonizes all living beings.

Ueshiba, respectfully called *Ōsensei* (Great Teacher), was still in Iwama teaching and training in Aikido as his fame spread across Japan and abroad, feeding the steady growth of his martial art throughout the 1950s. Among the Japanese martial arts traditions introduced internationally after the Second World War, Aikido stood in an unequalled position because of its non-competitive approach and message of peace. There was a significant increase in the number of people seeking Aikido instruction, and some of the senior students - Gozo Shioda, Koichi Tohei, Ueshiba's son Kisshomaru - began to take an active part in spreading its lessons overseas by sending teachers.

In the early 1950s, Aikido was first introduced to France by Minoru Mochizuki (1907-2003), and shortly thereafter to the United States by Koichi Tohei. In 1961, Ueshiba made his first and only visit to Hawaii, accompanied by his students, Koichi Tohei and Nobuyoshi Tamura (1933-2010) in order to attend the opening ceremony of the newly completed Honolulu *Aiki* Dojo, the first facility outside of Japan built specifically for the practice of Aikido. (Tohei had been visiting Hawaii since 1953, and he returned a number of times in the ensuing years, building a thriving Aikido community before Ueshiba's first visit.) Tohei's concise and clear methods, especially on the topics of *ki*, were well-received in Hawaii's cross-cultural environment. So much so that, at the time, Ueshiba said, "I have come to Hawaii in order to build a 'silver bridge.' Until now, I have remained in Japan, building a 'golden bridge' to unite Japan, but henceforward, I wish to build a bridge to bring the different countries of the world together through the harmony and love contained in Aikido. I think that *Aiki*, offspring of the martial arts, can unite the people of the world in harmony, in the true spirit of *Budo*, enveloping the world in unchanging love."<sup>51</sup>

In March of 1969 Ueshiba was diagnosed with terminal liver cancer. Rather than undergoing surgery, he insisted on spending his remaining time in his *dojo*. A month after being

released from the hospital, on April 26, 1969, Ueshiba took his son's hand, smiled, and said, "Take care of things," and passed away in his sleep at the age of eight-six. Prior to his death, he instructed his disciples with one final message: "Aikido benefits all the people for the world. It is not only yours. Train hard to serve the mission for the universal peace."<sup>52</sup> Since then, his wish has been passed on, and will continue to live in the Aikido practitioner's heart.

From the 1980s onwards, Aikido has been attracting a diverse range of people - regardless of age, social status, gender, culture, nationality - because of its well-balanced training emphasis on technical, spiritual, and ethical aspects.

"Sixty years have passed since the spread of Aikido overseas began. During this time, Aikido has become established in 130 countries. Aikido has taken root all over the world because it is recognized as a way to train the mind and body, and as such, its value extends beyond race and border.... Aikido is expected internationally now as a new culture of humanity in the 21st century."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Kisshomaru Ueshiba, *The 100th Anniversary of the Birth of Ueshiba Morihei, Founder of Aikido Memorial Photo Collection* (Tokyo, Japan: Kodansha, 1983), 57.

<sup>52</sup> Kisshomaru Ueshiba, *Aikido Kaiso Ueshiba Morihei Den* (Tokyo, Japan: Shuppan Geijutsusha, 1999), 296. Translated by the author.

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.aikikai.or.jp/eng/aikido/about.html>

## Achieving Optimal Performance Is the Intervention for MPA

Not many people would call one of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century's greatest violinists and humanists, Lord Yehudi Menuhin (1916-1999), “a beginner,” but that is exactly what he was, when, at some point in his 80<sup>th</sup> year, the life-long learner had his first lesson in Aikido.<sup>54</sup>

What path could have possibly brought him to this point?

As a renowned concert violinist, Lord Menuhin understood optimal musical performance intrinsically - those moments when artist and instrument become a harmonious single entity onstage - a seemingly magical event that captivates, astonishes and transforms the audience. The problem was he simply could not find a way to teach his master class students how to get to that state, let alone the children in his MUS-E® program, which seeks to promote music, culture, and harmony in schools faced with violence and discrimination.

Enter Aikido, which teaches techniques that not only diffuse violence, but also provide a step by step approach to optimal performance. This is essentially how Lord Menuhin found himself in the 1996 film, “The Beginner,” with Kenjiro Yoshigasaki, the *Doshu* (lead instructor) of more than 120 Aikido *dojos* throughout Europe, South America and South Africa.<sup>55</sup> It is also how Aikido became part of the International Yehudi Menuhin Foundation's MUS-E® program, which has 1,000 socially engaged artists launching 50,000 children in 13 countries on “a journey to greater fulfillment and self-knowledge through the arts.”<sup>56</sup>

The words “self-knowledge” and “fulfillment” could have come directly out of Aikido's playbook, which is known for strengthening mental health through self discipline and instilling a

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<sup>54</sup> “The Beginner - A meeting between Yoshigasaki Sensei and Yehudi Menuhin - Aikido.” <https://youtu.be/kg1dRPIRti4>

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.menuhin-foundation.com/portfolio/mus-e-artists/>

sense of wholeness in mind, body and spirit. But how does one measure such an experiential effect in the individual? There are a couple of recent dissertations on Aikido that tried to do just that: “A Study of Perceived Stress, Anxiety, Somatic Symptoms, and Spirituality in Practitioners of the Martial Art Aikido” by Howell E. Tapley (2007) and “Yoga and Aikido Practice: An Investigation into Anxiety” by David Jacobs (2009). However, neither of these studies delivered empirical scientific evidence that Aikido practice lowered anxiety scores. Like the practice itself, they could only allude to its potential, concluding that, “Higher levels of daily spiritual experience may be associated with lower levels of perceived stress, anxiety and somatic symptoms.”<sup>57</sup>

The motivation of Tapley’s study was derived from the fact that Aikido has received little attention with regard to health-related research despite its primary goals of promoting general well being. Ditto David Marc Jacobs’ (2009) investigation of the relationship between Aikido and yoga practice on anxiety levels. Again, Aikido was selected because of the lack of quantitative studies investigating the potential psychological benefits of its practice. Jacobs concluded that these benefits were ineffable, that their potentially anxiety-lowering contributions, difficult to quantitatively assess or even identify.<sup>58</sup>

What can be said is that any investigation into self - if honest - is good for the soul. As the late Joseph Campbell, the writer best known for his work in comparative religions and the nature of myth, said: “The cave you fear to enter holds the treasure you seek.”<sup>59</sup> In other words, if a pianist seeks a resolution to MPA, she must first understand exactly how it develops and why. To that end, anxiety coach David Carbonell, PhD, summarizes MPA’s development and the body’s reaction to it in this manner: “Performance anxiety...happens when you focus on yourself and your anxiety, rather than your presentation or performance.... It stems from a tendency to

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<sup>57</sup> Howell E. Tapley, “A Study of Perceived Stress, Anxiety, Somatic Symptoms, and Spirituality in Practitioners of the Martial Art Aikido,” (dissertation, University of Alabama, 2007), 1.

<sup>58</sup> David Jacobs, “Yoga and Aikido Practice: An Investigation into Anxiety,” (PhD diss., Pacifica Graduate Institute, 2009), 91.

<sup>59</sup> <http://aikidocenterla/blog/?p=300>

resist and fight your anxiety, rather than to accept and work with it. It's the result of thinking of the performance situation as a threat, rather than a challenge. The first step in mastering stage fright, and all kinds of performance anxiety, is to get a good understanding of just what kind of problem you're dealing with<sup>60</sup> (because) it fools you with discomfort, and fools you into responding as if you are in danger.”<sup>61</sup>

Indeed, the human response to danger and/or a perceived ‘threat’ is instinctive and hardwired. This is exactly what Charles Darwin discovered when he went to a snake exhibit at the London zoo. Darwin tried to remain perfectly calm while putting his face as close to a striking poisonous snake as possible. And yet, every time the snake lunged at him from behind its glass enclosure, Darwin jumped backward in fright *even as he knew he was safe*.

“My will and reason were powerless against the imagination of a danger which had never been experienced.”<sup>62</sup>

Charles Darwin

He concluded that his reaction to fear was an ancient one, unaffected by modern civilization. And he was right. This fight or flight mechanism stems from the hypothalamus, which is in charge of all of the body’s basic automated responses and is one of the oldest aspects of the brain. When danger/anxiety approach, the hypothalamus sends a message to the pituitary, the body’s master gland (which is located at the base of the brain below the optic chiasm), to release adrenocorticotrophic hormone, which in turn spurs the adrenal glands (located just above the kidneys) into action. This results in a flood of hormones coursing through the blood stream, including catecholamines (epinephrine and norepinephrine), cortisol, testosterone, estrogen and the neurotransmitters serotonin and dopamine, all of which work together to create the body’s stress response. The ensuing physical reaction - muscle tension, shallow breathing, accelerating

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<sup>60</sup> <http://www.anxietycoach.com/performanceanxiety.html>

<sup>61</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vvr4OmkqvHQ>

heart beat, increased blood pressure, suppression of lacrimal and salivary glands (dry mouth and eyes), loss of hearing, tunnel vision, shaking and finally disinhibition, a psychological term that means a lack of self restraint coupled with poor risk management: “Disinhibition affects motor, instinctual, emotional, cognitive, and perceptual aspects with signs and symptoms similar to the diagnostic criteria for mania.”<sup>63</sup>

Of the five categories of psychotherapeutic techniques for overcoming anxiety - behavioral, cognitive, educational, pharmacological, or comprehensive - “A comprehensive approach that works on the mind and the body has been found to be the most beneficial,”<sup>64</sup> according Tess Anissa Miller in her 2004 thesis, “Why Did It Sound Better in The Practice Room?” But while Miller covers an immense body of research, defining MPA, discussing possible causes, listing some of the most current coping strategies, including her own study on journal writing as a coping method, there is not much consideration as to the mind/body connection. In point of fact, Aikido provides the only truly expansive approach, offering multiple ways to deal with anxiety, including relaxation techniques, lifestyle reforms, physical awareness, and cognitive changes by turning negative thoughts into positive ones. But, in order to understand how Aikido perceives MPA, its definition, the way it has been conceptualized, must be addressed. This is because the reduction or elimination of MPA has been heretofore considered a required condition to achieving optimal performance. This means changing the perception of MPA from a mental disorder into something that actually benefits the pianist. In “Managing Performance Anxiety and Improving Mental Skills in Conservatoire Students through Performance Psychology Training: A Pilot Study,” Margaret S. Osborne, et. al., concurs, “Anxiety is not a maladaptive state which needs to be removed in order to perform optimally.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1886), 38.

<sup>63</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disinhibition>

<sup>64</sup> Tess Anissa Miller, “Why did it Sound Better in The Practice Room? A Guide to Music Performance Anxiety and How to Cope with It Through Journal Writing,” (dissertation, Michigan State University, 2004), 51.

<sup>65</sup> Margaret S Osborne, Don J Greene & Don T Immel, “Managing performance anxiety and improving mental skills in conservatoire students through performance psychology training: a pilot study,” *Psychology of Well-Being Theory, Research and Practice* 4:18, (December, 2014): 4.

Adding to this discussion is psychologist Noa Kageyama, PhD,<sup>66</sup> a concert violinist who is on the faculty of the Juilliard School in New York City and runs the web site BulletProofMusician.com: “I’ve come to understand that anxiety itself is not the problem. The problem is that most of us have never learned how to use adrenaline to our advantage. By telling ourselves and our students to ‘just relax,’ we are actually doing each other a disservice by implicitly confirming that the anxiety we feel is bad and to be feared. I soon learned to welcome the rush of adrenaline and to use that energy to power my performances, and to perform with more freedom, conviction, and confidence than I ever imagined possible.”<sup>67</sup>

Kageyama uses the phrase ‘optimal zone of activation’ to describe the aforementioned. It’s very similar to the state of mind of that of a Japanese phrase, *Kajiba no Bakajikara*, which literally means ‘idiotic strength’ shown in an emergency — such as a fire. This phrase is used in the sense that the extraordinary strength would be activated to overcome great obstacles in an emergency. In other words, the optimal zone becomes accessible only if one is in a situation that leaves no room for labeling or identifying one’s thoughts: a blank slate of a mind. Yoshinori Kono (1949-),<sup>68</sup> a Japanese martial arts master and researcher of the arts of *kobudo*,<sup>69</sup> cites this phrase often to explain that the physical ability is potentially limitless when it comes to this blank slate of a mind. However, the logical rationale: conceptualization, analyzation, interpretation, and theorization of a phenomenon create anxiety (worry, fears, and doubts), and it

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<sup>66</sup> Performance psychologist, New World Symphony. Seminars and workshops: Juilliard, Oberlin, Indiana U., New England Conservatory, U. Wisconsin, Northwestern, Lynn U., U.S. Armed Forces School of Music, Starling-Delay Symposium, Music Teachers' National Association, National Association of Teachers of Singing, NETMCDO, National Orchestral Institute, Opera America, Mt. Sinai School of Medicine. Solo violin performances with Columbus Symphony, Central Ohio Symphony, Welsh Hills Symphony, Springfield Symphony. Broadcasts on WOSU-FM, WCBE-FM, WBNS-TV, and Israel Kol Ha'Musica. Fellowship, Aspen Music Festival. <http://www.juilliard.edu/faculty/noa-kageyama>

<sup>67</sup> Noa Kageyama

<http://www.bulletproofmusician.com/how-to-make-performance-anxiety-an-asset-instead-of-a-liability/>

<sup>68</sup> Born in Tokyo in 1949, Yoshinori Kono is a Japanese martial arts master and researcher. He launched Shouseikan Dojo in 1978, and has dedicated himself to research and development of a unique style of martial arts. His research has been utilized effectively in various fields such as sports, performance of musical instruments, engineering, and nursing care. In 2003, he was the subject of an eight-part series in the Ningen Koza (Humanity Lectures) series on NHK's educational channel. Kono was a visiting professor at Kobe College for three years from 2007.

Presently, he mainly lectures and conducts seminars and workshops on bujutsu across Japan. He has authored many books, including *Ken no seishinshi* (The Spritual History of Swordsmanship) (Chikumashobo); *Budo kara bujutsu e* (From Budo to Bujutsu) (Gakken Publishing); *Jibun no atama to karada de kangaueru* (Thinking with Your Own Mind and Body) (Co-authored with Takeshi Yoro, PHP Institute); and *Karada o toshite jidai o yomu* (Reading the Times Through Your Body) (Co-authored with Tatsuru Uchida, basilico; paperback: Bungeishunju). <http://www.wochikochi.jp/english/foreign/2012/08/kouno-america.php>

<sup>69</sup> A very old Japanese fighting/martial tradition. It was handed down for many generations through handed down from mouth to ear before ever being written down.

limits our optimal zone of activation, since it shuts down the direct access to the instinct before even mobilizing body. Kono said that it should be noted that the optimal performance happens effortlessly and spontaneously without straining herself/himself in such an emergency situation. There is no split second to return to consciousness to become doubtful. It is generally regarded as superhuman strength these days, but everyone has this instinct and ability if the circumstances present themselves.

Kageyama's further hones this physical effect into eight performance psychology skills:

- 1) preparation: learn how to practice the right way;
- 2) manage energy: learn how to control your body's response to adrenaline;
- 3) confidence: learn how to build confidence;
- 4) courage: learn how to play courageously (vs. playing tentatively and worrying about mistakes);
- 5) concentration: learn how to slow down and regain control of your mind – even under pressure;
- 6) focus: learn how to quiet the mind, focus past distractions, and stay in the moment;
- 7) resilience: learn how to recover quickly from mistakes (so you don't make even more mistakes);
- 8) determination: learn how to keep yourself motivated and relentlessly pursue your goals.

All of this is very good and noteworthy, but what are the actual steps to achieving these ends? What Kageyama is essentially saying is that optimal performance is the cure for MPA, which, in Aikido's purview, is an imbalance between the mind, body and spirit — the very problem Ueshiba sought to vanquish through his martial art. Thus, Aikido is specifically designed to enhance a pianist's optimal performance rather than reduce the incidence of MPA. In this way, they balance each other out, leaving no imbalance to disrupt the performance. This is accomplished through the incorporation of Aikido's principles into daily life — not just in the concert hall. This enables pianists to see not only the psychological aspects of MPA, but also its effect on the body as a whole through training.

## Defining Optimal Performance

Thomas Mark's *What Every Pianist Needs to Know About the Body* describes optimal piano performance as, "Piano playing that is accomplished by high-quality movement, in which each part contributes its proper share with no tension, will be free, expressive, and secure."<sup>70</sup> This, however, doesn't address the third prong — the Aikido concept of the "spirit," which is *ki*, the connector of the mind and body. This may be easy to comprehend as a concept, but difficult to manifest within the body — the reason Aikido offers training on how to recognize and apply the benefits of *ki*.

Because of the style of Aikido training (in pairs), pianists receive feedback from their partners and teachers. In this way, they are constantly monitored and corrected in terms of their breathing, alignment and tension during practice. Thus, this type of training helps pianists tune into the *Aiki* body and determine if it is moving efficiently and flexibly in perfect harmony. For example, when a pianist is told by her partner that her shoulders are tense, she relaxes the muscles, which, in turn, relieves the tension in her mind, creating a constant biofeedback loop. This kind of awakening experience encourages the arousal of *ki* awareness until it becomes a common habit. Aikido practitioners are also trained to be in touch with their bodies; monitoring imbalanced areas themselves, correcting them on the spot, sensing any changes from subtle to obvious, and comparing the feelings and sensations of before and after each correction, i.e., teaching, questioning, and evaluating their bodies to determine what is efficient and harmonious. Furthermore, an Aikido practitioner becomes sensible enough to perceive what is going on in her training partner's body. These experiences become self-regulating and self-correcting systems not only during training but also in daily life (e.g., walking, sitting, playing the piano, holding a baby). Indeed babies are a great model for the perfect *Aiki* body: They breathe deeply and naturally into their *hara* and can flex every muscle in trying to rollover, then stop and completely

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<sup>70</sup> Thomas Mark, *What Every Pianist Needs to Know About the Body* (Chicago: GIA Publications, Inc., 2003), 5.

and immediately relax. Therefore, pianists who train to be tuned into their *Aiki* body in daily life, including practice time, don't need to do anything different onstage, since their daily state of mind and body are already the foundation of optimal performance.

In his book *In Search of the Warrior Spirit*, Richard Strozzi-Heckler observed a common problem in Aikido practitioners: “To compensate for their difficulties they do what almost everybody does in this art (Aikido): They force when they should flow, hurry when they should wait, and tighten instead of relaxing.... To their bewilderment, they are finding that Aikido is not something one succeeds in by being stronger and it's not just one more sport you can simply figure out and do. It's a complete reprogramming in mind, body, and spirit.”<sup>71</sup> The same can be said of pianists. Conscious awareness is critical for the process of “complete reprogramming.” The conscious awareness of *ki* not only makes each element more interconnected and unified, but also transforms the mind and body relationship to one of mutual cooperation. This is the *ki* magic. Each component - mind, body, mind, and spirit - has its own role (and function), and pianists cannot miss any of them in their effort to play optimally.

To summarize, *ki* awareness gives the mind the ability to focus on the mind/body connection and keeps both from getting stuck. This means that the mind doesn't stop at or stick to any particular negative thought while the body remains fluid, keeping all tension at bay. Furthermore, the mind is freed up and flows to where it needs to be, which is in the present moment — now.

*Ki* awareness is essential optimal body conditioning via the following components:

- breathing
- centeredness
- posture and alignment

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<sup>71</sup> Richard Strozzi-Heckler, *In Search of the Warrior Spirit* (Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 2007), 75.

- relaxation and flexibility
- grounding, and
- integration of body

*Ki* awareness acts to optimally condition the mind in the following ways:

- soft concentration instead of intense
- mind flow (freeing mind from random thoughts)
- mindfulness in body = mindlessness in mind

The idea of “mindlessness” is an especially important concept, because, “Music performance is both a natural human activity, present in all societies, and one of the most complex and demanding cognitive challenges that the human mind can undertake.”<sup>72</sup> This statement reveals why the mind needs to be functional to perform optimally in challenging situations. Thus, pianists need to know that, “playing the piano is brain work, and pianists need to be constantly aware of the different functional areas of the brain they call on in their playing. Not just in a general way, but in specific ways, all the time.”<sup>73</sup> As Thomas Mark further explained in *What Every Pianist Needs to Know About the Body*, our brains have several distinct functional areas. There is the cognitive function, which is the process of knowing and remembering; the sensory function, which governs sensation including kinesthesia; the motor function, which controls movement; and the emotional function, which relates to feelings. Some activities may use just one of these functions, but all of them are combined in piano playing. In addition, Linda Elder, author of *Critical Thinking and Emotional Intelligence*, suggests that the human mind is composed of three basic functions: the cognitive, emotional, and volitional functions (which is different from Thomas Mark’s listing of the cognitive, emotional, and

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<sup>72</sup> Robert J. Zatorre, Joyce L. Chen & Virginia B. Penhune, “When the brain plays music: auditory–motor interactions in music perception and production,” *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 8, no. 7 (July 2007): 547.

<sup>73</sup> Mark, 14.

motor). As Elder explains, “The third function of the mind, our ultimate driving force, is the formation of volition or will. Within this function lie our agendas, purposes, goals, values, desires, drives, motivations and commitments. This is the mind’s engine, which revs us up and moves us forward toward some action, slows us down, or leads us to back away from some action. As our driving force, volition plays a key role in determining our behavior. These three basic mental functions, albeit theoretically distinct, operate in a dynamic relationship to each other, ever influencing one another in mutual and reciprocal ways. Thus, although they serve different roles, they are concomitant.”<sup>74</sup> Meanwhile, the *Reciprocal Modulation of Cognitive and Emotional Aspects of Pianistic Performances* asserts that, “High level piano performance requires complex integration of perceptual, motor, cognitive and emotive skills.”<sup>75</sup> Even though each study perceived the brain functions differently, the conclusions are roughly the same in that each distinct brain function must fully cooperate during piano practice and performance.

Ueshiba would be proud of this deductive reasoning, because, in order to perform optimally, the integration of body and the mind is essential. Relevant to this point is Thomas Mark’s following remark: “When our awareness of our bodies in movement is based on refined kinesthesia and a good body map, our conception of the music - the sound - will fuse with our con-ception of our physical movement that produces the music. Putting the point slightly differently: When we conceive a musical result, that conception will instantly translate into a kinesthetic awareness of the movement that brings about the result. Our musical con-ception will be realized, in sound, through movement. Refining and deepening our musical ideas will elicit ever more refined and subtle movement. Practicing will become a matter of conceiving a sound, then discovering and practicing the move-ments that produce the sound. This uniting of musical and kinesthetic imagination depends on developing kinesthesia, a sense of embodiment, and a good body map, but thinking in these terms from the outset will help you develop those things.

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<sup>74</sup> Linda Elder, “Critical Thinking and Emotional Intelligence,” *Critical Thinking Across the Disciplines* 16, no. 2 (Winter, 1996). <http://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/cognition-and-affect-critical-thinking-and-emotional-intelligence/485>

<sup>75</sup> Marcia K. Kodama Higuchi, José Fornari, Cristina M. Del Ben, Frederico G. Graeff, João Pereira Leite, “Reciprocal Modulation of Cognitive and Emotional Aspects in Pianistic Performances,” *PL oS ONE* 6:9, (September, 2011): 1.

As you progress along this path, the musical imagination and the kinesthetic imagination can feed on each other, assisting each other to higher and higher levels.’<sup>76</sup>

The point about ‘a kinesthetic awareness of the movement’ in the above statement is essentially the same as the conscious awareness of *ki* acting on the body element in Aikido, as mentioned previously. Aikido training allows pianists to develop their refined kinesthesia and extend *ki* awareness to each part of their bodies to establish their own ‘Body Mapping.’<sup>77</sup> — not in any esoteric way, but with practice and training and with the added benefit of honing the ability to deflect not only MPA but also an oncoming attack from anywhere.

Thus, the main purpose of this thesis is to observe MPA in a holistic way rather than the sum of its many individualistic parts. The Holism<sup>78</sup>-Aikido approach emphasizes the organic, functional, and harmonious relationship between mind, body, and spirit. In order to perform optimally, the unification of these three entities is essential, and the great unifier is respiration, i.e., learning how to breathe correctly. This is how the achievement of optimal performance becomes the intervention for MPA.

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<sup>76</sup> Mark, 13-14.

<sup>77</sup> Thomas Mark’s Body Mapping is the process whereby different parts of the body that may take part in a certain movement are brought into one’s sensory awareness.

<sup>78</sup> Tapley, 1. The theory that parts of a whole are in intimate interconnection, such that they cannot exist independently of the whole, or cannot be understood without reference to the whole, which is thus regarded as greater than the sum of its parts. Holism is often applied to mental states, language, and ecology. The opposite of atomism. [www.oxforddictionaries.com](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com).

## Aikido Principles: *Ki*, *Hara*, and *Kokyu*

*Ki* is mysterious and vague because of its invisibility, but it is actually universal if one knows when, where, and how to feel it. All living beings are extant because of the spirit and purpose of *ki*; this life force is called *seiki*. *Ki* is something that anyone can cultivate and utilize, but only with training and a proper attitude. Aikido offers the breathing method to learn how to develop the generator of *ki*, which is *hara*, and utilize it. “In a word, *ki* is perception, beginning with the level of feeling. In the *Pali* or *Sanskrit* tradition it is called *prana*, or *prajna*, which has the dual meaning of both “breath” and “wisdom.” *Ki* is the energy that is always hidden yet ever present. It only appears as feeling and sensitivity, yet we are never apart from it. Without air we can survive for several minutes, yet without *ki* we would perish instantly,”<sup>79</sup> said William Gleason in his book, *Aikido and Words of Power*. Likewise, Mitsugi Saotome<sup>80</sup> (1937-) said that the founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba used the term, *ki* in various ways: “He would refer to an aura as *ki*, and concentration was *ki*. Sometimes it was confidence, sometimes vitality, and sometimes strength. He used it to describe the universal energy force and many times to describe the function of God. Just know reality and you will know *ki*.”<sup>81</sup> As Ueshiba says, “In all matters related to the arts, including martial arts, superiority is determined through training and practice, but true excellence is dependent on *ki*. The grandeur of heaven and earth, the brilliance of sun and moon, the changing of the seasons, heat and cold, birth and death, are all due to the alternation of yin and yang. Their subtle working cannot be described by words, but within it all things fill life by means of *ki*. *Ki* is the origin of life, and when *ki* takes leave of form, death ensues.”<sup>82</sup> In other words, “*Ki* is an essential element of all aspects of oriental culture — philosophy, medicine, art, physical training, and the full significance of *ki* only becomes clear

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<sup>79</sup> William Gleason, *Aikido and Words of Power* (Rochester, Vermont: Destiny Books, 2009), 83.

<sup>80</sup> An Aikido instructor currently living in the United States. Saotome began as a special apprentice with the Founder of Aikido, Ueshiba Morihei (Osensei) in 1955 and continued for 15 years until the Founder’s death in April of 1969. “I meditated on Osensei’s spirit for three days and three nights and I felt it was his wish that I should go (to the United States to spread Aikido.) This country is a great experiment, a melting pot of people from many different cultural backgrounds living together, the world condensed into one nation. The goal of aikido and Osensei’s dream is that all the peoples of the world live together as one family, in harmony with each other and with their environment. The United States has the opportunity to set a great example.” Mitsugi Saotome

<sup>81</sup> Saotome, 150.

through firsthand experience,”<sup>83</sup> said John Stevens in his book, *Aikido: The Way of Harmony*. Therefore, there is neither a perfect translation of *ki* or English equivalent. As Ueshiba stated, “Through *budo* (Japanese martial arts), I trained my body thoroughly and mastered its ultimate secrets, but I also realized an even greater truth. That is, when I grasped the real nature of the universe through *budo*, I saw clearly that human beings must unite mind and body and the *ki* that connect the two and then achieve harmony with the activity of all things in the universe.”<sup>84</sup> Therefore, the *ki* aspect is very essential to optimal piano performance as the product of the mind-body-spirit unification, since *ki* may be utilized as a basis of body integration, and also a connector of mind and body for pianists. It may happen only when *ki* is cultivated by conscious awareness to be drawn and integrated into pianists’ bodies with proper breathing, or *kokyū*.

The Japanese term, *kikai tanden*, the “Sea of *Qi* or *Ki*,” shows that *hara* and *ki* are inseparably locked together. *Hara* is known by many names - *tanden* in Japan, *dantian* in China<sup>85</sup> - but it means the “center of being.” Because of the modern craving to understand spirituality, it is conceptualized by the Japanese, Chinese, and other East Asian cultures to be the vital center of one’s personal connectedness of gravity, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. In Aikido, however, *hara* is not an intellectual concept, rather, it refers to the actual physical, mental, and spiritual experience.

*Hara* is the foundation of Aikido movements. It is located in the abdomen between the bottom of the ribcage and the anterior of the iliac crest, a couple of inches below the navel, inside the body (nearer to the spine, a few inches in from your front skin surface). Every movement starts from *hara* in Aikido, since *hara* is believed as the generator of vital energy - *ki* - the center of gravity in the body. In the *Zen of Martial Arts*, Joe Hymas put it this way, “Aikido

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<sup>82</sup> Kisshomaru Ueshiba, *The Spirit of Aikido*, (New York: Kodansha USA, Inc., 1984) 23.

<sup>83</sup> John Stevens, *Aikido, The Way of Harmony*, (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1984), 196.

<sup>84</sup> Kisshomaru Ueshiba, *The Spirit of Aikido*, 24.

<sup>85</sup> The term, *hara*, in Japan is deeply interlinked with the term, *tanden* (*dantian* in Chinese). *Tanden* is translated from the Japanese to mean cinnabar field and is also known as the elixir field. It can therefore be understood as a place in the body where the elixir or life is created.

practitioners, as well as most martial artists and *Zen* practitioners, believe that all of the *ki* of the universe flows through them at *tanden*, traveling infinitively in all directions. No matter where you are, you are always the center of the universe. By holding *tanden* and remaining centered, you feel one with the universe and at the same time totally aware of your bodily relationship to the universe.”<sup>86</sup> As *hara* is considered as the source of physical strength and mental power, it needs to be nourished through *ki* development and cultivated by *kokyu* (breathing). The component of Aiki body, which, again, is the basic physical state required in Aikido, involves proper posture, body alignment, flexibility, grounding, and integration while fully inflated with *ki*. *Ki* is generated in the *hara* (continuously like a spring), and runs through the body from that central point, imparting energy equally throughout. Therefore, there are no dead parts in the Aiki body, and that’s what required in order to perform optimally. The actual exercises: *Ibuki Undo* and *Ame no Torifune* are aimed at gathering *ki* and loading it into *hara*. Its activation is through the *Furitama* exercise in next section.

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<sup>86</sup> Joe Hyams, *Zen in the Martial Arts*, (Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher, Inc., 1979) 64.

## ***Ki* Gathering, Loading, and Activating**

### Gathering *Ki* and Loading It into *Hara* Exercises

1) *Furitama*<sup>87</sup> — “soul shaking” exercise for activating *ki*.

- Stand with legs apart (about shoulder width).
- Place hands together with the right hand over the left in front of *hara* (a couple of inches below the navel).
- Leave space between the hands and *hara* big enough for an imaginary ping-pong ball.
- Shake the hands vigorously up and down.
- While shaking them, concentrate and repeat the words “*Harae-do-no-Okami*” — the Shinto ritual of purification.



1



2

2) *Ame no Torifune*<sup>88</sup> – “rowing the boat” exercise for gathering *ki* and loading it into *hara*.

*Torifune*, also known in aikido as *kogi-fune* or *funakogi*, is best known as “the rowing exercise.” It involves the arms and body moving in a boat rowing motion. This exercise consists of three parts. Each part is followed by *Furitama* exercise (see above).

- Stand straight and put your left leg forward (*Hidari Hanmi*), as in figs. 3-4.
- Clench both fists with your thumbs inside, as in fig. 4.



3



4

- Lean forward and move the arms as though rowing a boat, starting from the left knee and ending near the armpits. As one “rows,” repeat shouting “Yie,” as in figs. 5-6.
- Perform this 20 times and then repeat the *Furitama* exercise, as in figs. 1-2.

<sup>87</sup> Yuktaka Yamamoto, *Kami no Michi The Way of the Kami*, (Stockton: Tsubaki America Publications Department, 1999), 118.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*



5



6

- Change to a right leg stance (*Migi Hanmi*), repeat the same rowing movement shouting “Ei” and “Ho” alternately, as in figs. 7-8.
- Do this movement 20 times and repeat *Furitama* exercise, as in figs. 1-2.



7



8

- Return to the left foot forward stance (*Hidari Hanmi*) and remake the clenched fists as before, bringing the hands up to the chest to a shout of “Yie,” and thrust them down and forward with hands opened and fingers extended to a shout of “Sa,” as in figs. 9-10.

- Once again, repeat *Furitama* exercise at the end, as in figs. 1-2.



9



10

3) *Ibuki Undo*<sup>89</sup> — a practice for receiving the *ki* of the universe through breathing.

- Stand with legs apart, about shoulder width, as in fig. 11.
- Place hands together with the right hand over the left in front of *hara* (a couple of inches below the navel), as in fig. 12.
- Leave space between them big enough for an imaginary ping-pong ball.

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<sup>89</sup> Ann Llewellyn Evans, *Shinto Norito: A Book of Prayers* (Bloomington:Trafford Publishing, 2007), 130.



11



12

*Chi-no-kokyu: Breath of Earth Exercise*

- Exhale slowly and bring the hands down in *chi-no-kokyu* (breath of earth) posture.
- Bring hands down the sides of our body as though pushing down the universe while exhaling through the mouth, as in figs. 13-15.



13



14



15

Ten-no-kokyu: Breath of Heaven Exercise

- Inhale through the nose as raising arms in *ten-no-kokyu* (breath of heaven) posture, as in figs. 16-19.
- Place hands together with the right hand over the left above the head, as in fig. 20.
- Bring down the held-hands close to *hara* quickly and end with a slight shaking motion to transfer the energy to *hara*, as in fig. 21.
- Repeat the cycle of *chi-nokokyu* and *ten-no-kokyu* 5 times in succession.



16



17



18



19



20



21

## Breathing is *Musubi*

“Steady breathing means a steady mind. This is because the body and the mind are directly connected,”<sup>90</sup> said Gozo Shioda in *My Spiritual Journey*. Spiritually speaking, breathing is *musubi*, which literally means to connect or tie two things together, referring to dualism, the resolution of spiritual and physical essence into one, such as heaven and earth, the rhythm of the cycles (e.g., life and death) and relationships (e.g., meeting and parting). According to Saotome, a disciple of Aikido’s founder, “The most important method for the body and the spirit to obtain the vital essence of life: *Ki* is through the breath, the yin and yang of respiration.”<sup>91</sup> In terms of Aikido, it is the breath that draws the spirit of *ki*. That spirit is called *seiki*, the creator of the energy flowing into and out of the *hara*. Mind and body are unified through *ki*; this action is called *ki-musubi*, which means the energy of the universe is connected to the center of the earth in a continual spiral movement (both upward and downward, equalizing one another and creating stability) through each individual *hara*.

This dynamic geometric energy flow is known in cosmometry and astrophysics as a horn torus.<sup>92</sup> Torus flow dynamics are seen in the formation of stars and galaxies, the Earth’s atmospheric and oceanic systems, the molecules, atoms and sub-atomic particles in all living things and, as Ueshiba brilliantly noted, in respiration, the very foundation of life. Aikido harnesses this dynamic energy flow through *ki*, *hara*, *musubi* and body movement in a very natural way. With this alignment, created by breathing properly, one cannot be beat. So while *ki*, *hara*, and *musubi* may be tough for the uninitiated to swallow, the science is unassailable.

Aikido disciple Gozo Shioda often lectured about the importance of breath power, which is the strength acquired while breathing, something all beings possess congenitally. We can

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<sup>90</sup> Shioda, *Aikido, My Spiritual Journey*, 197.

<sup>91</sup> Saotome, 154.

<sup>92</sup> <http://www.cosmometry.net/the-torus---dynamic-flow-process>

access breath power anytime, freely and limitlessly, and it takes only three steps: inhale, hold, and exhale; it's a strength that has nothing to do with size or muscles. In Aikido, one starts a technique with inhalation through the nose (like the gathering of the power of a wave before it crests), building in intensity to a peak prior to exhaling with the full force of the continuous energy. In other words, an Aikido practitioner invites the wave with the breathing action (before meeting the opponent), and, in exhaling, goes with the flow, redirecting the energy away from the attack and deflecting the violence. In *Zen* Buddhism, this refined ability to sense approaching energy is called *maai*, *deai*, and *zanshin*. If one can breathe correctly, a calm, clear, and stable state of mind develops and *sumikiri* (serenity), where *muga*<sup>93</sup> and *mushin*<sup>94</sup> are revealed, is attainable. It is a state of mind unoccupied by thought or emotion and thus connected to the vastness of the cosmos and its continuous energy cycle. This mindset, which cannot get stuck in negative thought, is attained by breathing.

The point is that, in order for pianists to perform optimally, breathing is essential; musicians need to understand that one's state of mind and breathing are closely related. From this perspective, pianists may obtain a benefit from integrating breath power into their performance in collaboration with what the author Thomas Mark called, "the kinesthetic imagination and the musical imagination"<sup>95</sup> in order to play optimally. For when anxiety strikes, breathing is the first bodily function that gets disrupted and a chain reaction in the body, including physical muscle tension, begins the avalanche that is MPA. This is because the human brain is wired to react defensively to physical and psychological threats.

This is why it's so important for pianists to understand the relationship between the nervous system and their emotions. Stress hormone levels are regulated by the autonomic nervous system (ANS), and the ANS has two components that balance each other (in a yin and

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<sup>93</sup> The mental state of *muga*—a state in which the mind did not interfere with the actions of their trained bodies.

<sup>94</sup> *Mushin* is the essence of Zen and Japanese martial arts. *Mushin* literally means the "mind without mind," and it is commonly called "the state of no-mindness." <http://www.zen-buddhism.net/zen-concepts/mushin.html>

<sup>95</sup> Mark, 13-14.

yang state), the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) and the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS). It's the SNS that stimulates the body into action in a threatening situation, i.e., the fight-or-flight response, while PNS calms the nervous system and promotes relaxation, sleep, and drowsiness by slowing the heart and breathing rates, constricting the pupils, and, among other things, increasing the production of saliva.

The vagus nerve<sup>96</sup> extends from the brain through body and controls the parasympathetic nervous system, which, in turn, regulates one's relaxation response through the deployment of a neurotransmitter called acetylcholine.<sup>97</sup> If the brain cannot communicate with the diaphragm via the release of acetylcholine from the vagus nerve, then breathing stops and death ensues. According to [www.calmclinic.com](http://www.calmclinic.com), a site for people with anxiety disorders, "There are many ways to activate the vagus nerve and turn on the relaxation response. When you take a deep breath and relax and expand your diaphragm, your vagus system is stimulated, you instantly turn on the parasympathetic nervous system, your cortisol levels are reduced, and your brain heals. When one feels anxiety, it causes shallow breathing...Shallow breathing is in almost all cases caused by anxiety. It's one of the most common - and most problematic - anxiety issues. People often misunderstand that shallow breathing is a reaction of needing more oxygen, so they start to yawn or breathe in deeply for compensation. However, anxiety is the one causing shallow breathing, because anxiety activated fight-or-flight response system. The fight-or-flight response is natural intuitive reaction that everyone has. As your fight or flight system activates elevation of heart rate, shallow breathing, and ultimately cause hyperventilation, which makes people confused with lack of oxygen. When you shallow breathe, each expulsion of breath takes out more Co2 than your body has created, because you're breathing out carbon dioxide too quickly. This makes all of the symptoms of hyperventilation worse. It can even cause dizziness, trouble

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<sup>96</sup> Vagus nerve, historically cited as the pneumogastric nerve, is the tenth pair of cranial nerves (CN X), supporting and interfacing with parasympathetic control of the heart, lungs, upper digestive track, and other organs of the chest and abdomen. It is the longest nerve of the autonomic nervous system in the human body. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vagus\\_nerve](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vagus_nerve)

<sup>97</sup> Acetylcholine is an organic chemical that functions in the brain and body of many types of animals, including humans, as a neurotransmitter—a chemical released by nerve cells to send signals to other cells. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acetylcholine>

concentrating/thinking, and many other aches, pains, and strange sensations all over your body. In a way, shallow breathing causes almost all of the most troubling symptoms of anxiety.”<sup>98</sup>

In light of this fact, when pianists feel MPA’s approach, they should commence with deep and controlled breathing through the nose to expand the diaphragm and create relaxation through the hormonal response system. This single exercise is the first and most important step to MPA damage control, but it is equally essential for pianists to practice breathing for the purpose of raising their conscious awareness of *ki* in everyday life. Since musicians are breathing all the time, the oddness of this dual-control system, involuntary and voluntary, is not usually acknowledged, but it’s this control flexibility that gives pianists choices between conscious awareness and subconscious breathing. In other words, pianists can change not only how they breathe, but also how their breathing affects both mind and body.

This was one of the messages at Yoshinori Kono<sup>99</sup>’s *Seminar for Musicians*, held on September 26, 2015 at Act City Hall in Hamamatsu, Japan. The program, which was designed by the Japanese martial arts master, is for musicians who are seeking efficient and economical ways of performing. From his martial arts perspective, which is non-musical, Kono observes each musician’s breathing methods and inefficient body movements, gives advice, and shares his experimental ideas. He pointed out that the author of this thesis employed unconscious and improper shallow breathing, which was interfering with the performance via an imbalanced mental state, calling it, “An awful struggle.” To deal with this struggle, Kono introduced the

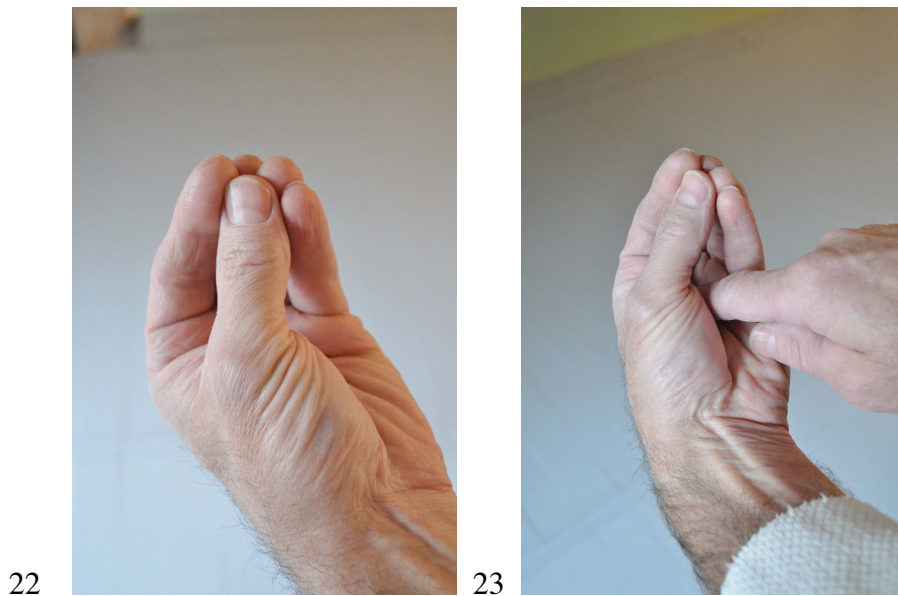
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<sup>98</sup> <http://www.calmclinic.com/anxiety/symptoms/shallow-breathing>

<sup>99</sup> Born in Tokyo in 1949, Yoshinori Kono is a Japanese martial arts master and researcher of the arts of *Kobudo* (A very old Japanese fighting/martial tradition. It was handed down for many generations through be handed down from mouth to ear before ever being written down). He launched Shouseikan Dojo in 1978, and has dedicated himself to research and development of a unique style of martial arts. His research has been utilized effectively in various fields such as sports, performance of musical instruments, engineering, and nursing care. In 2003, he was the subject of an eight-part series in the *Ningen Koza* (Humanity Lectures) series on NHK’s educational channel. Kono was a visiting professor at Kobe College for three years from 2007. Presently, he mainly lectures and conducts seminars and workshops on *bujutsu* across Japan. He has authored many books, including *Ken no seishinshi* (The Spritual History of Swordsmanship) (Chikumashobo); *Budo kara bujutsu e* (From Budo to Bujutsu) (Gakken Publishing); *Jibun no atama to karada de kangaeru* (Thinking with Your Own Mind and Body) (Co-authored with Takeshi Yoro, PHP Institute); and *Karada o toshite jidai o yomu* (Reading the Times Through Your Body) (Co-authored with Tatsuru Uchida, basilico; paperback: Bungeishunju). <http://www.wochikochi.jp/english/foreign/2012/08/kouno-america.php>

ancient acupressure technique<sup>100</sup> employed during emergencies. It is accomplished by stimulating *Chinshin no Kyusho* - or *Rokyu* - a known acupressure point, which is the trigger to assuage one's fear. According to Kono, the flight or fight response contracts the diaphragm and leads to muscle tension in the shoulders, which, in turn, results in the death of a piano performance. This acupuncture point, when accompanied by proper breathing, can bring the body back into alignment. From this technique, Kono developed his own acupressure method for relieving physical stress:

- Put all finger tips together into the shape of a rose bud to find *Chinshin no Kyusho*, which is located in the deepest pocket of the palm, the point that needs stretching and release. Apply pressure, as in figs. 22-23, then



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<sup>100</sup> Yoshinori and Harunori Kono. *Bujutsu & Shintaijutsu*, (Tokyo: Yama to Keikokusha, 2014) 108.

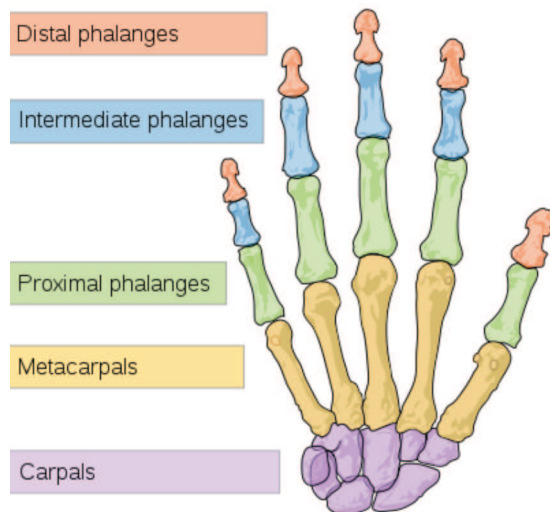


fig. 24

- Hook the medicinal (ring) fingers from each hand together at the intermediate phalanges (fig. 24), while still maintaining a relaxed rosebud shape and body, and press down, as in fig. 25.



25

This technique should be applied before every practice and performance in concert with the following life-changing breathing exercises, which will help pianists learn how to load *ki* into the *hara* and induce a comfortable state of well being throughout a performance.

## Effective Breathing Exercises

### 1) *Suwari Shomen-uchi Undo* (The Sword Cutting Movement from Sitting Position)

The action in *Suwari Shomen-uchi Undo* is based on Aikido sword cutting movements.

- Open the hands into a bloomed flower shape (or as if holding a sword) while maintaining body alignment, as seen in figs. 26-27.



26



27

- Inhale through the nose while thrusting the arms toward the sky in a coordinated effort.

At the top of the movement, the pianist should be standing on her knees with hands above her head, as seen in figs. 28-29.



28



29

- Stay on the knees while holding the breath (the peak), as in fig. 30.



30

- Exhale through the mouth, letting the arms fall down as the body returns to the sitting position, as in figs. 31-32. Repeat 8 times.



31



32

This showcases the power of breathing into *hara* and trains the mind to discover *ki* and *mushin* energy, breathing, and serenity.

## 2) *Happo Undo* (The Eight Directional Movement)<sup>101</sup>

This exercise teaches students how to maintain both awareness of their surroundings and the basic principles of Aikido while pivoting in eight different directions. The purpose is to extend *ki* while pivoting north-south, east-west, SW-NE, SE-NW - like the hands on a compass, covering 360 degrees. This is the same sword-cutting practice as in the previous exercise, but accomplished while standing, stepping, and pivoting. Again, this creates awareness through mindful breathing, body action and spatial surrounding, something pianists need to consider before during and after performance.

<sup>101</sup> Figs. 33 and 34 are borrowed from Adele Westbrook & Oscar Ratti, *Aikido and the Dynamic Sphere: An Illustrated Introduction*, (Clarendon: Tuttle Publishing, 1989). Westbrook & Ratti have given permission in their book, that all the images in their book are free to be used as long as it used towards the teaching and explanation of aikido.  
<http://www.northsideaikido.com/en/wazas>

1) With the right foot forward (pointing straight ahead), begin breathing in through the nose as the arms are going up. When the wrists are above the head (as if holding a sword), the breath is held. As the left foot begins to step into the direction of the cut, begin exhaling through the mouth as the arms literally drop, then pivot 180 degrees (opposite direction) and repeat four times, slicing down and pivoting, as in fig. 33.

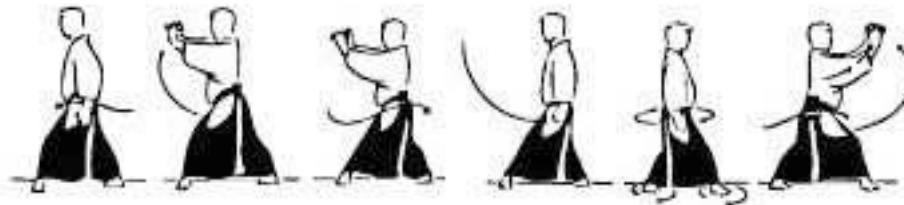


fig. 33

2) Repeat entire 360-degree motion twice, as in fig. 34.

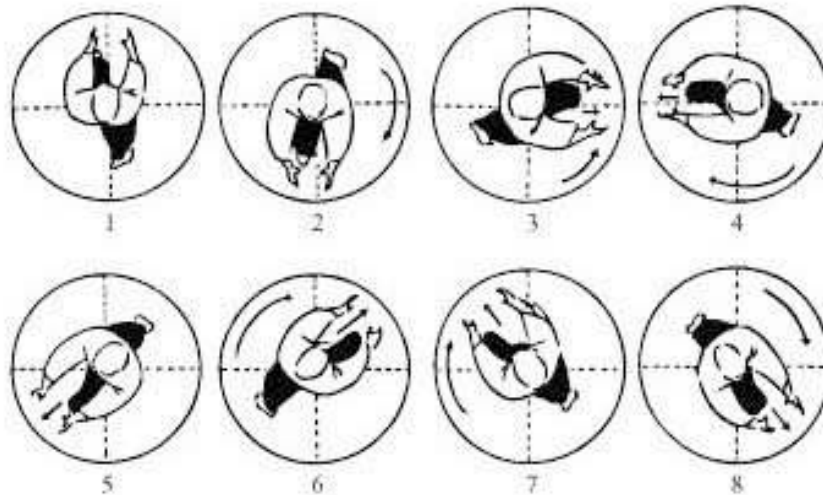


fig. 34

## Creating Optimal Performance with *Ki* Continuity and *Ki* Awareness

Aikido and musical performance are both time-based arts and so share this important commonality. Musical performance is a fluid mental process that requires commitment in each moment from beginning to end. As previously stated, MPA disrupts this fluidity and, as a result, runs away with the performance. The idea of fluidity is a Zen philosophy connoting its transitory nature. Such transitoriness is expressed in the memorable phrase by C. S. Lewis: “The same wave never comes twice,” and the very beginning phrase of ‘*the Hojoki*<sup>102</sup>/*An Account of My Hut*’: “The flowing river never stops and yet the water never stays the same. Foam floats upon the pools, scattering, re-forming, never lingering long. So it is with man and all his dwelling places here on earth.”<sup>103</sup> This means that to perform optimally, each moment of the performance needs to be involved with the pianist’s whole being with the cooperation of each distinct brain and body function (cognitive, sensory, motor, emotional, and volitional). “Playing the piano is one of the most complex of human activities,”<sup>104</sup> said Thomas Mark in his book, *What Every Pianist Needs to Know About the Body*. As if to emphasize this point, Margaret Osborne wrote in *Experimental Brain Research*, “High levels of motor control and learning, mastery over mind and body, implicit recall and smooth performance, as well as performance in front of an audience”<sup>105</sup> underline the complexity faced by each artist. In other words, a pianist must encompass the coordinated effect of an entire orchestra, then perform optimally and cooperatively with coordinated timing in a continuous flow of music, the unbroken stream of time going through the past, the present, and into the future.

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<sup>102</sup> A classic literary and philosophical work by Kamo Chōmei, written in Japanese. Written in a style of poetic diary, in 1212, the work depicts the Buddhist concept of impermanence (*mujō*) through the description of various disasters such as earthquake, famine, whirlwind and conflagration that befall the people of the capital city Kyoto.

<sup>103</sup> The very beginning phrase from Kamo Chomei's a long essay titled 'the Hojoki/An Account of My Hut.' Its English translation is done by Yasuhiko Moriguchi and David Jenkins.

<sup>104</sup> Mark, 14.

<sup>105</sup> Osborne et al., 4 quoting M. Yoshie, K. Kudo, T. Murakoshi, & T. Ohtsuki, “Music performance anxiety in skilled pianists: effects of social-evaluative performance situation on subjective, autonomic, and electromyographic reactions,” *Experimental Brain Research* 199:2 (2009): 117–126.

In the book, *Awareness: The Key to Living in Balance*, Osho describes the mind<sup>106</sup> as nonexistent, “(It’s) not a thing, but an event. A thing has substance to it. An event is just a process. A thing is like a rock. An event is like a wave.”<sup>107</sup> Pianists actually believe that the mind exists, when, in fact, “...thoughts are passing freely through a vast emptiness in a series of events, where there is no hindrance, no obstacle, no wall that prevents the thought stream”<sup>108</sup> — like musical notes passing in a performance. In this way, a sublime musical performance and Zen are exactly the same.

The very phenomenon of observation, of witnessing the thought stream without analyzing and labeling it, is the mastery of mind, according to Osho. Aikido’s pacifist ideals also tell us that there is no enemy if one is not labeled/identified as such. This means that if pianists don’t label their individual thoughts as negative or dangerous, MPA cannot take hold. Indeed, it’s the identification and categorization of all kinds of thoughts, including fears, that add tension and induce performance hiccups and disasters. Therefore, pianists need to be in the moment of the performance, allowing thoughts to pass through their minds like notes in the music without getting stuck. That, of course, is easier said than done, which is why Aikido insists on practice and repetition. In life, as onstage, pianists must continually remind themselves of the following:

- 1) That thoughts are merely passing through, that they are rootless.
- 2) That the manipulative mind appears only when thoughts are labeled.
- 3) That disengagement from identifying and labeling thoughts allows them to pass through without getting stuck.
- 4) That breathing is the way to connect the body with the mind through *ki*.

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<sup>106</sup> Osho, *Awareness: The Key to Living in Balance*, (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2001)

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

Finally, Lama Zopa Rinpoche (1945-), a Tibetan Buddhist scholar, suggests meditating on emptiness while walking, which is the way to practice meaningful mindfulness.<sup>109</sup> When pianists apply this technique during practice, they asked themselves, “What am I doing?” Their mind replies, “I am playing the piano.” Then they ask themselves, “Why do I say, ‘I’ am playing the piano?” And their mind replies, “The only reason I say this is because my aggregate of body, the label ‘I,’ is playing the piano.” In this way, Lama Zopa Rinpoche means to take the ego out of the performance. By eliminating the ‘I’ and making it about the pianist’s ‘aggregate body,’ the ego remains unattached and unlabeled. Therefore, when pianists feel anxiety on stage, they simply need to go back to their bodies by taking a deep breath and focusing on the *hara*. This is essentially the reason why Aikido is often called, “moving *Zen*.”

Since piano performance is a “time-based” art, a sense of continuity and awareness are the most important concepts to secure optimal performance. The following three philosophical aspects of *Zen* are the true secret of Aikido, and they are only revealed through training and repetition in the proper order —

- 1) *Maai*,
- 2) *Deai*, and finally
- 3) *Zanshin*.

The truly great performers - musicians like Menuhin - understand these concepts intuitively through their experience of sublime performance, which, by its very nature, is *maai*, *deai*, and *zanshin* — a *Zen* state. Aikido, through its *Zen* underpinnings, can actually teach otherwise superb musicians how to get there. For these three principles are the culmination of 2000 years of practice, teaching and refinement by oriental cultures:

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<sup>109</sup> Lama Zopa Rinpoche, *Virtue & Reality: Method and Wisdom in the Practice of Dharma*, (Lincoln: Lama Yeshe Wisdom

## 1) *Maai*

*Maai* literally means “interval” - distance - and is a Japanese martial arts term that refers to the space between two opponents in a confrontational situation, i.e., the rules for “engagement” and the distance between two practitioners. *Maai* is a complex concept, incorporating not just the distance between opponents, but also the time it will take to cross the space, the angle and the rhythm of an attack. “*Maai* is essentially the balance and control of space. The ultimate purpose of practicing *maai* is to understand the realm of perception, intuition, and insight. *Maai* is the emptiness in which one can communicate with the opponent. When completely open to that communication, you can understand the opponent’s spirit before the physical contact and reaction begin.”<sup>110</sup> In other words, *maai* is the method to predict the following:

- a) The timing to engage the opponent based on the distance and the ability to read an opponent’s *ki*,
- b) The timing in which one blends one’s flow of power with that of the oncoming attacker,
- c) The timing of applying the right Aikido technique at precisely the critical moment,
- d) The timing of avoiding an attacker who is flying at you, and
- e) The timing of the meeting of an oncoming attack.

Thus, *maai* is an extremely important basic skill in Aikido. This method of finding the proper timing is also a fundamental skill in piano playing that becomes ever more complex. To achieve effective timing to perform, pianists need to develop an awareness of the rhythmic cycle through conscious breathing without interrupting the flow.

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Archive, 1998) 85.

## 2) *Deai*

*Deai* is the timing involved in controlling space to create a reaction. It is the meeting of positive and negative, the exchange.<sup>111</sup> Training to improve *deai* is critically important. Correct timing and the geometrics of spiral relationships are essential in order to execute Aikido techniques effectively. Proper timing is possible and occurs only when the paradoxical combinations of proper concentration with relaxed flexibility and perception are created. Over-concentration results in loss of elasticity, and it blocks perception and makes immediate spontaneous reaction impossible. The philosophy behind this *deai* concept is *Ichigo Ichie* - one life, one meeting. In any meeting, there is only one chance, which is the concept of transience in *Zen*. Therefore, each moment of the performance shared by pianists and their audiences is considered precious and fleeting, a period in time that will never come back.

## 3) *Zanshin*

Zen master Anzan Hoshin describes the occurrence of MPA-like failure when *zanshin* is not realized: “*Zanshin* means ‘the remaining mind’ and also ‘the mind with no remainder.’ This is the mind of complete action. It is the moment in *kyudo* (*Zen* archery) after releasing the arrow. In *shodo* (*calligraphy*), it is the finishing of the brush stroke and the hand and brush moving smoothly off the paper. In taking a step, it is the weight rolling smoothly and the next step arising. In breathing in completely, it is this breath. In breathing out completely, it is this breath. In life, it is this life. *Zanshin* means complete follow through, leaving no trace. It means each thing, completely, as it is. When body, breath, speech and mind are broken from each other and scattered in concept and strategy, then no true action can reveal itself. There is only hesitation, or trying to push oneself past hesitation. This is the mind of hope and fear, which arises because one is trying to live in some other moment, instead of in the moment that arises now. One is comparing, planning, or trying to maintain an illusion of control in the midst of a reality which is

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<sup>110</sup> Saotome, 169.

completely beyond control.”<sup>112</sup> In other words, Hoshin’s ‘remaining mind’ refers to a state of mental readiness and relaxed alertness (like a cat), which must remain unbroken throughout the performance. In this regard, *zanshin* could be considered the backbone of the performance.

The concepts of *maai*, *deai*, and *zanshin* can be applied to a piano performance in the following ways:

- (a) A critical time for pianists is right before a performance while waiting for the curtain call; this period of time is *maai*. This concept can be realized by gathering *ki* through proper breathing, centering the *hara*, extending *ki* towards the stage, the audience, the piano and the space, blending in with the energy of the venue as a whole.
- (b) When pianists first encounter the audience as they walk onto the stage, this moment is called *deai*, which is the timing of the meeting. *Deai* could be applied to any moment of contact (e.g., the moment when a pianist’s finger touches the key. The moment pianists start a new piece in the program.) After a pianist creates *deai* with the audience, she bows and the audience acknowledges with clapping. The *deai* is this meeting between the pianist and the audience, the exact time a connection is made.
- (c) Once this connection is established, every single movement made by the pianist becomes a part of the performance, all of which must be thoughtfully conceived. Every single gesture, such as the approach to the bench, sitting at the bench, adjusting the bench, placing the foot on the pedal, the fingers on the keys, sitting, breathing, centering — it’s all part of the art: It’s mindfulness.

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 173-174.

- (d) The timing of all gestures and body movements are also part of this art. The art is not just one way *ki* extended from the pianist, but also *ki* extended from the audience. The mutually blended *ki* creates Aiki movement and flow. This is why piano performance and Aikido are exactly the same.
  
- (e) When pianists complete their action, it's *zanshin*, i.e. a feeling of the continuation of the performance, the noble end of the sound of the last key(s) and the decay of the sound into silence. Then, there's the moment between that silence and the recognition by the audience that the work has concluded, the coexistence of the ending and the beginning of the next movement.

Thus, the application of the sense of continuity and awareness - *maai, deai, and zanshin* - supports not only the flow of music, but also the flow of the entire performance. It evokes a pianist's constant sensitivity to making each transient moment more meaningful. Pianists need to incorporate the application of this sense of continuity and awareness into their daily practice. An example of a piano solo recital, where *maai, deai, and zanshin* concepts could be applied, is revealed in fig. 35.

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<sup>112</sup> Zanshin by Zen Master Anzan Hoshin July 13th 1988, Daijozan



This following diagram shows the possible applications of *maai*, *deai*, *zanshin* in between two pieces of music, fig. 36.

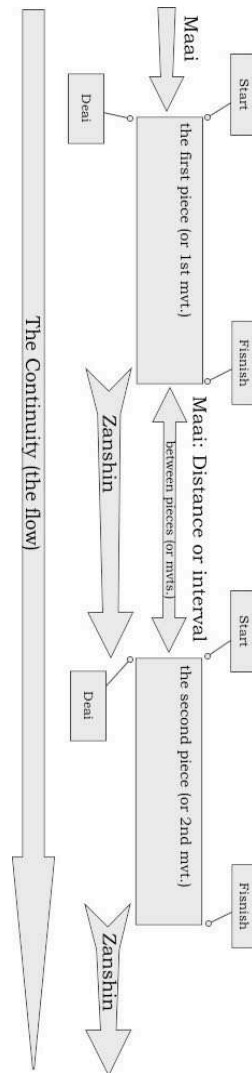


fig. 36

The following figure shows the *maai*, *deai*, and *zanshin* principles in action within a piece of music, fig. 37.

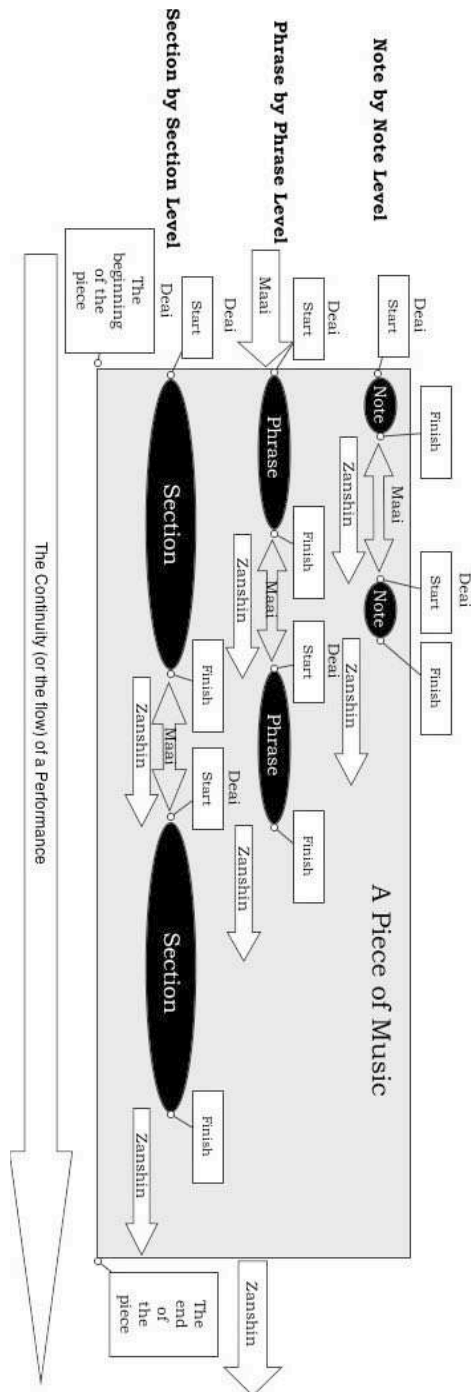


fig. 37

In summary, pianists can reach the deepest understanding of these three elements through Aikido training, which raises their sense of continuity and awareness. This sensitivity is, yet again, an intervention to MPA in and of itself. Pianists need to be in the moment from the

beginning to end of the concert. When fear and anxiety enter the mind during a performance, the Aikido technique of *Randori*<sup>113</sup> may be applied, since these thoughts come in multiples and randomly. In fact *Ran* means chaotic randomness and *dori* is “to grasp.” This allows a pianist to defend herself against multiple attackers - or thoughts - that interrupt the flow of the music. As David Carbonell, PhD, of AnxietyCoach.com notes, “Stage fright is like being heckled mercilessly during your performance, and getting into an argument with the heckler, except that it's your own mind doing the heckling. You get so involved in your internal struggle that you don't get involved with the actual performance. Most people with performance anxiety fright get tricked into focusing on themselves, struggling against anxiety in a vain effort to get rid of it.”

<sup>114</sup> Carbonell’s viewpoint is highly congruent with Aikido principles — if there is no enemy, there can be no opponent. Although MPA is the internal conflict<sup>115</sup> between pianists and their internal ‘hecklers,’ it’s possible to remove the disinhibition aspect through *ki* continuity and *ki* awareness by employing the Aikido practice of *Jiyuwaza Awase Undo* (see next chapter for a full explanation), which portrays the heckler as a training partner, a useful coping strategy when MPA strikes.

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<sup>113</sup> *Ran*: chaos/randomness and *dori*: taking or grasping, a form of aikido practice in which a designated one person defends against multiple attackers in quick succession without knowing how they will attack or in what order.

<sup>114</sup> <http://www.anxietycoach.com/performanceanxiety.html>

<sup>115</sup> Conflict is the term used to refer to any situation where the individual is pulled in different or opposite directions. Psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud saw conflict as opposing forces within the mind. He felt they began in childhood and persisted throughout life. He also recognized that conflict was one of the most important factors underlying human behavior. He knew people would go to any extreme to avoid anxiety, and that internal conflicts were the source of anxiety. The attempts at avoiding anxiety play a major role in molding the individual’s behavior. Freud believed that anxiety resulted from the conflict between sexual and aggressive desires seeking fulfillment versus the fear of these desires and their consequences. <http://www.canarsiecourier.com>

## **Blending Exercises for Staying in the Moment: *Jiyu Waza Awase Undo***

*Jiyuwaza Awase Undo*, a freestyle blending exercise, was created by Russell Jacobson as a specific training method for two partners, allowing them to stay connected and remain in the moment. What is unique about the *Jiyuwaza Awase Undo* is that the roles of defender and attacker are reversible between the two training partners, depending on the movement and energy flow. [Although *Jiyuwaza Awase Undo* employs elements of *Randori*, a form of aikido practice in which a designated (single) person defends against multiple attackers in quick succession, it is really about *ki* blending to deflect the ‘heckler’ and change the course of an MPA attack.] The purpose of this exercise is to:

- 1) refine one’s sensibility to feel the natural flow and blend with his/her partner;
- 2) raise situational awareness;
- 3) learn to maintain a calmness in the mind by staying emotionally neutral (all without activating the fight-or-flight response)<sup>116</sup>; and
- 4) know how to maintain flexibility in body and mind without losing centeredness.<sup>117</sup>

The basic rules of this training program are as follows:

- (a) Once the connection between the two training partners is established, each person commits to stay with it, moving by responding to his/her partner’s physical feedback, which means the defender and attacker positions spontaneously become interchangeable.
- (b) There is no resistance.
- (c) There is no concern about winning or losing, advantage or disadvantage.
- (d) Each person maintains his/her Aiki body.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Cannon, Walter (1932). *Wisdom of the Body*. United States: W.W. Norton & Company. A physiological reaction that occurs in response to a perceived harmful event, attack, or threat to survival.

<sup>117</sup> Meyer, Ron. and Reeder, Mark. Center: *The Power of Aikido*, Frog, Ltd., 2000

<sup>118</sup> The basic physical condition that is crucial to Aikido training. It requires the great posture, the total body relaxation, flexibility, especially in hip, and the centeredness in hara without losing the fullness in a sense of balanced body structure.

- (e) Each person executes any appropriate Aikido technique, which will emerge spontaneously in a manner determined by the positioning of their bodies, direction of the movement, relative dynamics, and timing.

This exercise should be done slowly and smoothly one on one, so that two partners can learn how to establish the focused connection between them in order to become a single, continuous entity, which is known as the Zen concept of oneness (in Shinto,<sup>119</sup> *musubi*). Thereafter, the exercise becomes increasingly complex with multiple random attacks occurring in realtime using the same principles. Here is additional explanation about *Jiyuwaza Awase Undo* by Jacobson:

*Jiyu waza awase undo* is an exercise involving free movement and technique while maintaining connection with a partner or partners. I developed this from the existing *Jiyu waza/Randori* (freestyle techniques), as it is known in the traditional Japanese martial arts, and added some elements from the Russian martial art of *Systema*.<sup>120</sup> This exercise is extremely beneficial in developing the qualities of sensitivity and connection, which are not only crucial to martial arts training (Aikido in my case), but in life and art as well. Many of my beginning students were having difficulty with the basic Aikido connection and movement and were in a state of struggle and tension with the concepts, because they were obsessed about getting them right. As a solution I thought to take the adversarial component out of practice and just focus on breathing, connection, and freedom of movement without having to worry about getting thrown or struck. This had instant positive results. Instead of thinking and worrying about which “technique” to do and how and when to apply it, they learned to just let go, focus on breath, connection and flowing with their partner’s energy. It frees up the body from unneeded tension, as well as tension in the

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<sup>119</sup> Shinto (“the way of the Kami”) is the name of the formal state religion of Japan that was first used in the 6th century C.E., although the roots of the religion go back to at least the 6th century B.C.E. Shinto has no founder, no official sacred texts, and no formalized system of doctrine. Shinto has been formative in developing uniquely Japanese attitudes and sensitivities, creating a distinct Japanese consciousness. Belief in *kami*—sacred or divine beings, although also understood to be spiritual essences—is one of the foundations of Shinto. Shinto understands that the *kami* not only exist as spiritual beings, but also in nature; they are within mountains, trees, rivers, and even geographical regions. In this sense, the *kami* are not like the all-powerful divine beings found in Western religion, but the abstract creative forces in nature. Related to the *kami* is the understanding that the Shinto followers are supposed to live in harmony and peaceful coexistence with both nature and other human beings. This has enabled Shinto to exist in harmony with other religious traditions. As the foundation for Japanese culture, Shinto has also played a significant role in the political realm. For centuries, Shinto religious festivals and ceremonies have become indistinguishable from the affairs of the government.  
<http://www.patheos.com/Library/Shinto>

<sup>120</sup> As the roots of the Russian *Systema* are in the Russian Orthodox Christian faith, the belief is that everything that happens to us, good or bad, has only one ultimate purpose. That is to create the best possible conditions for each person to understand himself. Proper training in the Russian *Systema* carries the same objective - to put every participant into the best possible setting for him to realize as much about himself as he is able to handle at any given moment.  
<http://www.russianmartialart.com/whatis.php>

mind, and, as a result, the movement becomes more natural and better able to deal with sudden changes. A great practice for living life.

Russell Jacobson/ Isshin Ryu Aikido

For a better understanding of the purpose of *Jiyuwaza Awase Undo*, please consider the words of Mitsugi Saotome (1937-),<sup>121</sup> a direct disciple of Ueshiba from 1958 to 1969, defining the relationship between conflict and harmony:

“Without the experience of conflict we cannot know harmony. Viewed without judgement, conflict is neither good nor bad. It is only the opposite of harmony and a stepping stone to creativity. We must challenge our concepts, grinding the negative edges from our attitude so that negative fighting spirit becomes creative fighting spirit. The stress and pressure of Aikido training brings this spirit to the surface and exposes it so that it can be examined and refined. Discovering our physical limitations causes us to reflect on the deepest meaning of harmony and conflict and to strive for a level of consciousness above the ego, closer to the Creator.”<sup>122</sup>

Saotome describes the relationship between conflict and harmony as the dualism of yin and yang. This dualism creates a productive and/or creative cycle, and it's related to the origin of the universe via the first explosion of creation.

“The universal energy was shattered in two; the universe began as a new order, and unity was created... From the origin to now, the universe has been continuously creating and refining according to the principles of universal creativity, the principles of opposites.... In order to truly understand this we must empty ourselves of ego, for ego is the boundary that sets limits on the human spirit.”<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> An Aikido instructor currently living in the United States. Saotome began as a special apprentice with the Founder of Aikido, Ueshiba Morihei (Osensei) in 1955 and continued for 15 years until the Founder's death in April of 1969. "I meditated on Osensei's spirit for three days and three nights and I felt it was his wish that I should go (to the United States to spread Aikido.) This country is a great experiment, a melting pot of people from many different cultural backgrounds living together, the world condensed into one nation. The goal of aikido and Osensei's dream is that all the peoples of the world live together as one family, in harmony with each other and with their environment. The United States has the opportunity to set a great example." Mitsugi Saotome

<sup>122</sup> Saotome, 23.

This duality, which is the ancient subtext of Aikido, teaches that the ego fools us into thinking that conflict is a bad thing and harmony is a good thing. Thus, when conflict is ignored or avoided in the exercise *Jiyuwaza Awase Undo*, there is a separation between the partners that caused increased anxiety, resulting in the failed transformation of conflict into a creative force. As Ueshiba said, “The principles of the true harmony of Aikido can be found by training in the principles of gravity.” Saotome pointed out that the word gravity is often misunderstood as controlling force or attachment. “However, as witnessed in the power of the collapsed star, the greatest gravity is emptiness. The gravity created by a vacuum, which is true emptiness: the absence of selfish ego.”<sup>124</sup> As the book, *Zen in the Martial Arts*, states: Because of the foundation of selflessness in Aikido, there are no territorial boundaries and no hierarchies between training partners — even the teacher-student relationship — just two people sharing their art to mutually improve the self.<sup>125</sup> The benefit from training in pairs, especially in *Jiyuwaza Awase Undo*, is the ability to correct tension and guide the partner relationship through mutual feedback. Therefore, *Jiyuwaza Awase Undo* is the perfect model of *Takemusu Aiki*,<sup>126</sup> the circulation of life-generating force — the infinitesimal horn torus — in a constant feedback loop with no sacrifice.

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Hyams, 12.

<sup>126</sup> *Takemusu Aiki* is Morihei Ueshiba’s vision of how the ultimate martial art should be, how his aikido should be, an art which harmonizes all living beings.

## **Integrated Body: Equal Distribution of *Ki* & Proper Contribution from Body Parts**

### **1) Equal Distribution of *Ki***

When *ki* is distributed equally in a pianist's body, it becomes alive and melds with the instrument, the audience, and the musician. This is done by *ki* awareness, which is distinctly different from focused concentration. Often the words *concentration* and *focus* are used interchangeably as a way to evoke one's attention. However, concentration can be a problem: When pianists concentrate on one thing, it becomes a focal point, and anything else withdraws into the background. In his book *What Every Pianist Needs To Know About The Body*, Thomas Mark describes the appropriate mental state for musicians as 'inclusive attention,' which is very similar to the Japanese martial arts concept of *seigan no kamae* (soft concentration). "We need to develop a field of awareness that includes all the things that bear on our playing, not just our hands and arms but our backs and legs and entire bodies. Within this field of awareness we can focus as necessary on whatever requires attention at the moment."<sup>127</sup>

### **2) Proper Contribution from Body Parts**

More often than not, pianists concentrate their energy on one part of the body - that which is in direct contact with the instrument - the fingers - and easily ignore the rest. However, it's important that they use their whole body in order to play in a fully integrated manner. Without this conscious whole body awareness, the supporting movements to the fingers (neck, arms, lungs, spine, shoulders, chest, hips, legs, feet) become neglected, making the body seize up, which allows MPA to creep into the conscious self during performance.

But by far the most dangerous state is when pianists do not notice an injury or muscle stiffness and continue to play: This is common behavior and it exhibits a lack of awareness,

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<sup>127</sup> Mark, 9.

which can also provide an opening through which MPA can creep. Without optimal physical performance, the body adapts — that's its instinct. This makes it incredibly difficult for pianists to understand their optimal physical state. Without that understanding, it's impossible to correct any problems.

Therefore, pianists need to practice conscious awareness of *ki* into their entire bodies, so that they can realize that piano playing is not just a finger-work, but complex movements by the integrated whole body unit. Aikido training directly helps with that. Also the connection with their instruments is an important aspect to be addressed to pianists, because pianists need to feel their bodies and their instruments as one unit. We shall come back to that topic late in this chapter.

### **Connection: *Ki* Extension from *Hara***

With conscious breathing, *ki* is generated in *hara* and equally distributed to the each part of a pianist's body. This means that, when playing the piano, the movement is generated from the *hara*, becoming its extension. Indeed, it could even be said that the *hara* is the movement. For instance, if a pianist played a chord in *fff* with both hands, without conscious breathing or a connection to the *hara*, the body would have a limited ability to play the chord. This is because there is no support from the other body parts: As a result, the fingers and wrists become stiff and fail to contribute their maximum share of the movement. To compensate for this limited physical ability to produce the sound, a pianist must use of more strength and force, resulting in even greater sacrifice. As a whole, this is a poor quality of movement that negatively affects the sound, resulting in no established connection between the pianist and the piano. There is only the sensation of hammering the keys on the finger tips, the result of poor to zero awareness and sensitivity. However, if a pianist's movement emanates from the *hara*, it becomes supported by the fully integrated body in a collaborative production of sound. This movement takes very little to no force at all. Once pianists feel the connection to their *hara*, they can establish the connection with their audience, their instruments, their music, and the performance space with the result being an improved quality of playing and sound.

## Basic Exercises for Establishing and Maintaining the Connection

### 1) *Maintaining a Connection Exercise No. 1*

The purpose of this exercise is to maintain a sense of connection with a partner. This exercise allows a pianist to feel where her *hara* is, as well as that of her partner's. This allows a *hara* to *hara* connection. This exercise is also effective in raising a pianist's awareness of her connectedness to the *hara*, which, in turn, allows the connectivity to expand to instrument, audience, and space.

- a) Two pianists stand facing each other, as in fig. 38.



fig. 38

- b) Place the ends of a *jo* (a short staff) at each person's *hara* (a couple of inches below the navel) without dropping the *jo*, as in fig. 39.



fig. 39

c) Start moving spontaneously and slowly while sensitively maintaining the *jo* between the two partners, as in figs. 40-49.





## 2) *Maintaining a Connection Exercise No. 2*

The same concept as in Exercise No.1, but instead of placing a *jo* between two partners, the physical connection is made through hand contact. However, since hands are considered extended versions of the *hara*, the practitioner needs to find her own connection while sensing her partner's.

- a) Practice in pairs. Put one's fisted hand (left) to the other's open palm (left). The one who has an open palm initiates the movement for the entire

exercise, while the other partner adjusts his movement to maintain the palm and fist connection without losing it, as in fig. 50.



fig. 50

- b) The initiator moves his open hand spontaneously along with his body, up and down, turning, etc., going from slow to medium speed as the follower moves efficiently to maintain the connection, as in figs. 51-54. Practice this for five minutes.





53



54

c) Switch roles, and do the same thing again.

## Applications of *Ki* Connection to Performance

Once the *ki* is gathered and loaded into *hara*, it needs to be utilized. *Ki* makes a connection to wherever it is extended or directed. The Japanese phrase, ‘*Ki kubari*’ means mindfulness or awareness (*ki*) and distribution (*kubari*); it means sensitive attention to someone or some situation. *Ki kubari* is an actual action of *ki* extension. Mindfulness is our ability to be aware of what is going on both inside us and around us. It is the continuous awareness of our bodies, emotions, and thoughts within our surroundings.

## How to Connect to the Sound

More often than not pianists perceive sound as their own to manipulate — an extension of their ego. This creates a distorted relationship with the music. If a pianist wants to be one with her sound, the ego must be purposefully disengaged. As the world-renowned pianist and composer Leon Fleisher said, “In making a music, the performer is not the star. The music is the star. The performer is the vessel. The performer is the channel through which music passes as a prism. We are indispensable. Without us, there is no music, but we are not the star.”<sup>128</sup>

This is the conceptual and spiritual idea behind *inori*,<sup>129</sup> which is also represented in *Gagaku*,<sup>130</sup> the Shinto ritual of music and dance: “*Gagaku* is the product of centuries of study by astronomers, mathematicians, musicians and physicists into the kind of music best suited to

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<sup>128</sup> Leon Fleisher: The Chamber Music of Johannes Brahms (Trailer) <https://youtu.be/OcKBluhGXFo>

<sup>129</sup> Prayer. An act of communion with the Universe/the Creator.

<sup>130</sup> The ancient traditional music of the Japanese Imperial Court, which can be traced back to the Nara period (1.300 years ago), today comprises the following repertoires: *tōgaku*, *komagaku*, *saibara*, *rōei* and Shintō ritual music and dance. The two Chinese characters used to write *gagaku* (literally ‘elegant music’) were originally used in China to signify Confucian ritual music.

[www.oxfordmusiconline.com](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com)

Often played during Shinto rituals, Japanese-style weddings and Imperial court events, *gagaku* is a combination of instrumental music, song and dance that has been practiced for over a thousand years in some form or another.

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2002/12/29/music/hideki-togi-out-to-gagaku-your-world/#.Vz89s2ZaQgU>

the Japanese ear,”<sup>131</sup> said Hideki Togi (1959-),<sup>132</sup> a composer, actor, musician, and former member of the Japanese Imperial Court Musician, who believes that *Gagaku* reminds performers and listeners that they are a part of the universe. “*Gagaku* has wind, string and percussion sections. The three wind instruments are the *hichiriki*, the *sho* and the *ryuteki*. When these three instruments are played together, heaven, earth and everything between become one. In this way, *Gagaku* represents a universe and has its own cosmology.”<sup>133</sup>

Togi, like Fleisher, considers himself a ‘vessel,’ the instrument and the music, the stars. As with any vessel, the sound flows through it. To perfect that flow, Fleisher describes a pianist as actually three people in one person: “Person A hears before he or she plays, so that they have a goal to strive for. They want it to sound a certain way. Person B is that part of you that actually does the playing, that depresses the keys. And then there’s Person C, who sits somewhat apart from you and listens to what goes on — listens to what’s coming out of the instrument. And if what’s coming out of the instrument does not match what Person A wanted — that goal, that ideal — Person C, the listener, tells Person B, the player, what to adjust in order to get closer to that ideal, that goal of Person A.”<sup>134</sup>

This is the essence of the idea of awareness in practice and practicing with awareness; it is an important aspect of both Aikido and piano performance. As previously stated, Aikido training uses antagonistic situations to reveal a practitioner’s inefficient physical movements as products of an affected mind. This training offers a self-observation and self-reflection process

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<sup>131</sup> Ryoko M. Nakamura, “Hideki Togi Out to Gagaku Your World,” The Japan Times, December 29, 2002  
<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2002/12/29/music/hideki-togi-out-to-gagaku-your-world/#.V0Z2bGZaQgU>

<sup>132</sup> <http://www.togihideki.net/en/index.html>

<sup>133</sup> 1) *Hichiriki*: It is a bamboo flute with a reed and nine finger holes, similar in many ways to the oboe, which traces its roots to the *hichiriki*. It has a range much like that of the human voice. It is said to express the voice of those who live on earth - in other words, humans.

2) *Sho*: It has seventeen bamboo pipes and is thought to resemble a phoenix at rest with its wings upright. It is capable of playing multiple tones simultaneously. It can be played either by blowing or inhaling. People of ancient times are said to have believed that the sound of the *sho* expressed a ray of heavenly light.

3) *Ryuteki*: It is a bamboo flute with seven finger holes and a term written with the characters for “dragon flute”, represents the sound of dragon that flies in the space between heaven and earth.  
<http://www.togihideki.net/en/index.html>

that improves the quality of movement and ultimately the quality of performance through the training partnership, a practice that is as beneficial for pianists during practice and performance as it is for martial artists such as Bruce Lee.

“That pause in the middle of action is one of my secrets, too. Many martial artists attack with the force of a storm without observing the effect of their attack on their opponent. When I attack, I always try to pause — stop action — to study my opponent and his reactions before going into action again. I include pause and silence along with activity, thus allowing myself time to sense my own internal process as well as my opponent’s,”<sup>135</sup> said Lee, who always controlled his opponent’s timing and energy.

And so it is with concert pianists: They, too, can control the pauses and periods of silence on stage without being dictated by the audience or performance protocol. When this stop action (e.g., the time between pieces, between movements within the composition, or after the performance) is included along with the process of self-observation and self-reflection, the silence becomes part of the overall ‘unbroken flow’ of the sound.

In other words, intentional practice with awareness connects the pianist with her sound and improves the overall quality by providing the space to assess challenges, make adjustments, and set a new direction. Therefore, the idea of taking the initiative in determining one’s own schedule (in life as in practice) is very valuable to pianists.

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<sup>134</sup> Daniel J. Kushner, “Pianist Leon Fleisher Will Share His Talent at Eastman School of Music,” *Democrat & Chronicle*, February 14, 2014.  
[www.democratandchronicle.com/story/lifestyle/art/2014/02/14/pianist-leon-fleisher-will-share-talent-eastman-school-music/5485273/](http://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/lifestyle/art/2014/02/14/pianist-leon-fleisher-will-share-talent-eastman-school-music/5485273/)

<sup>135</sup> Hyams, 52.

## How to Connect to the Instrument

Oneness between a pianist and her instrument cannot be achieved as long as the piano is viewed as the purview of just the fingers. This perspective limits optimal performance and makes it impossible for the bodies of musicians to wholly connect with their instruments. Again *ki*, through *musubi*, is the connector. This might be better understood by explaining a Samurai's connection to his sword, which is not a tool, but an integrated part of his body. The tip of the sword is the extended version of the Samurai's *hara*. "In other words, to respect a sword, is to respect its angle and speed, as well as the direction of its cut, none of which is possible without unification with the user. The user can't cut without the sword, and the sword can't cut without the user. They must combine in order to carry out the effort,"<sup>136</sup> said Tatsuro Uchida, author of *The Body of Japan*.

The same can be said about the relationship between a pianist and her instrument. The tips of the fingers<sup>137</sup> and the palms<sup>138</sup> of pianists are considered places where the most concentrated *ki* gathers for transmission to the instrument and beyond. Without this connection to the *hara*, the energy stops with the finger's first contact on the keyboard.

To put this concept within the framework of everyday life, a *ki* connection can be made with the simple gesture of shaking hands: This is how *ki* is extended (transmitted) at the touch and with it comes an instant awareness of the person's intention. This is perhaps why Americans make such a big deal of shaking hands and assigning meaning to it, and it's absolutely one of the Aiki movements (a blending of energy) seen in daily life. Conversely, the Japanese don't have a custom of shaking hands, but a *ki* connection (perception through reading energy) can be

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<sup>136</sup> Tatsuro Uchida, *Nihon no Shintai The body of Japan* (Tokyo, Japan: Shincho Sha, 2014) 141.

<sup>137</sup> Kunio Yasue and Kouki Yamamoto, *Kami ni Chikadukuniha Hacho wo Awaserebaii* (Tokyo, Japan: Fu-unsha, 2015), 160.

<sup>138</sup> "Taoist practitioners and other energy-healers who use qigong emission (external qi therapy) techniques to amplify and balance another person's qi (life-force energy) frequently use the palms of their hands as a place from which to emit energy." [http://taoism.about.com/od/Acupressure\\_Treasures/a/LaoGong-PC8.htm](http://taoism.about.com/od/Acupressure_Treasures/a/LaoGong-PC8.htm)

established without physical contact. It's an instinct learned from the beginning of life. "Ki is the cosmic essence of life... We breathe, touch, taste, see, and hear reality every second of our lives, but still we search for a philosophical explanation. The universe gives no philosophical explanations, only experience. You must acknowledge the truth and reality of now,"<sup>139</sup> said Saotome, an original disciple of Aikido's founder, alluding to the fact that *ki* can only be cultivated through training and experience.

This is why Aikido is very experiential: Its nature must be felt in the *hara*. Therefore, the pianists' connection to their instruments may be established through their intentional gesture. This can be visualized by extending *ki* from the *hara* through the tips of fingers to the keys, from the keys to the hammers, from the hammers to the strings, and from the strings to the air in a never-ending rotation between the heavens (universe) and earth. This is an infinite *ki* transmission.

Composer Hideki Togi, a *Gagaku* player (ancient Japanese court music with wind, string and percussion instrumentation), said, "Regardless of classical or contemporary repertoires, my focus remains committed to playing the instrument as if it has its own physiological optimum way to be played. The most natural and the optimal way of playing the instruments is not to control them with human desire, but to respect the music that the instruments want to play. I believe that this way supports the optimal sound that an instrument has, and it makes the music alive."<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Saotome, 151.

<sup>140</sup> Hideki Togi, *Gagaku* (Tokyo: Shueisha Shinsho, 2000), 198-199.

## How to Connect to the Audience

As previously stated, *ki* can be extended from the *hara* through the pianist and the instrument to the audience: The question is — how much? Too much or too little *ki* results in an unhealthy connection that can lead to MPA.

When a pianist feels overwhelmed by the audience, her mind will begin to wander and the audience becomes concerned. This is because once *ki* is in the *hara* it must be evenly distributed and utilized; if it isn't, it saturates the body and causes an imbalance from which a variety of problems erupt into the avalanche of negative feelings. Shallow breathing, sweating, and rapid heart rate ensue as a physical manifestation of the emotional and psychological imbalance. As previously discussed, these are the symptoms of MPA. To establish a healthy connection with the audience, a pianist needs to regain her feeling of centeredness to support what is about to take place: Performance. In other words, a pianist needs to learn to become aware of any imbalance in order to correct it by returning to the *hara*, centering the breathing (*musubi*), and reconnecting with the sound, the instrument, and the audience.

From the holistic Aikido viewpoint, a musician needs to think about all perspectives, not just the direct link between two different positions (pianist and audience). In this way the performance space becomes the medium that embraces both and provides a comfortable, well-balanced environment. Furthermore, as a visualization exercise, the performance space can be thought of as a horn torus,<sup>141</sup> with the pianist at the center, generating *ki* from the *hara* in an upward spiral that returns to the performer to revitalize them. This is important because MPA tends to shrink the performance and the space into negative thoughts, which rebound in a circular motion, trapping the musician on a dizzying merry-go-round. This is why the aforementioned breathing exercises are so fundamentally important to optimal performance.

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<sup>141</sup> <https://youtu.be/tbruPR3o0Zc>

There is a Japanese expression “*ki wo nomareru.*” Its literal meaning is to have one’s *ki* swallowed. Hiroshi Tada,<sup>142</sup> who holds the ninth degree black belt in Aikido, said that the atmosphere of a space varies, and so one needs to be prepared before entering it (a stage, for example). In the book, *The Body of Japan*, Tada introduces the Aikido founder’s method of overcoming the overpowering *ki* of a space: “It is quite simple. At first, one needs to observe the space, feel the atmosphere and accept it as it is. Then, inhale a deep breath that sucks down everything, including all of the people in the space, into *hara* like Sun Wukong (in the mythological story of the Monkey King), and make your mind transparent. If performed freely with clarity and purity in mind, your opponent (the space) will become positive.”<sup>143</sup> According to Tada, this method needs to be practiced in daily life to ready oneself for any overpowering situations at any moment. This tells us once again that proper breathing is as essential to a pianist’s overall sense of security and overall well-being as it is for the martial artist. As the age-old Japanese saying goes, “A true martial artist is always ready.”

The basis for overcoming powerful spatial *ki* begins with walking exercises. This walking exercise is good for managing a pianist’s centeredness, which, in turn, enhances balance and stability while entering and exiting the stage.

### **Walking Exercise**

- 1) Have a clear way ahead.
- 2) Stand with the strong feeling of centeredness in the *hara* and commence good breathing into it.
- 3) Gaze straight ahead without aiming at a target.

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<sup>142</sup> A Japanese Aikido teacher holding the rank of 9th dan in the Aikikai.

<sup>143</sup> Uchida, 114. Translated from Japanese to English by the author.

- 4) Walk forward while exhaling slowly through the mouth.
- 5) Make sure the walk is from the *hara*, not from head, feet or chest.
- 6) Maintain the same height of the *hara* throughout the walk; do not bounce. It should feel like the coordinated body is riding on smooth and continuous breathing.
- 7) Walk as long as the exhalation is stable.
- 8) Stop before the exhalation weakens.

## Piano Placement Based on *Ki* Directions

The placement of the piano onstage is crucial to optimal performance. It's the responsibility of the musician to make the changes necessary to command the performance space and correct any imbalance. In order to understand this relationship, several Aikido concepts must be addressed: *Hanmi* (stance), *seichusen* (line), *shikaku* (direction), *irimi* (entering the space), and *tenkan* (deflecting attacks). They are all about securing the safest position in the event of an attack (as well as onstage). In order to better understand these terms with regard to piano placement, it's important to know exactly what they mean in the martial arts.

In most of Japanese martial arts, *hanmi*, which literally means "half body," is a specific stance or posture to ready the body for any kind of situation (one foot is placed forward, so the opponent is literally seeing half her partner's body); in Aikido it also means the mutual respect training partners have for each other's space on the mat. (*Hanmi* is seen in daily life as the flexibility associated with movement, such as walking: one foot is placed in front of the other, with knees relaxed and body weight shifting naturally.<sup>144</sup>) Without *hanmi*, the *ki* between two entities is crushing, as in fig. 55. This should be tried by two people in order to realize the meaning, because Aikido is experiential.

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<sup>144</sup> Saotome, 186.

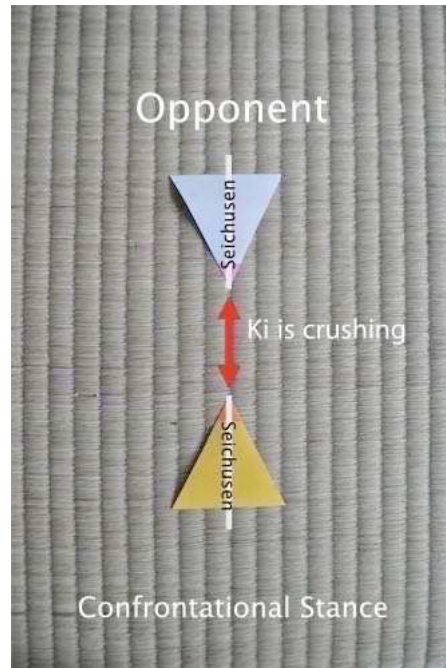


fig. 55

*Hanmi* is related to *hara* and *seichusen*<sup>145</sup> (centerline of one's body). *Seichusen* runs from the top of the head, through the hips, legs and feet, and into the ground, equally bisecting the body and uniting the energy between the universe and the center of the earth through *ki*. *Seichusen* is one of the most significant concepts in aikido because most of the vital points in a human body fall along this center line. If the *seichusen* is threatened, the nervous system will intuitively react to defend it (or invite MPA).

In Aikido, moving off one's *seichusen* (fig. 56) will create not only provide security, but also an advantageous position against the training partner. This position of advantage is called *shikaku*, which literally means dead angle or blind spot. (A person who rides a bike or drives a car understands the idea of blind spots implicitly. These are dangerous.)

<sup>145</sup> *Seichusen* also means the line of attack. It is also called *chushinsen*.

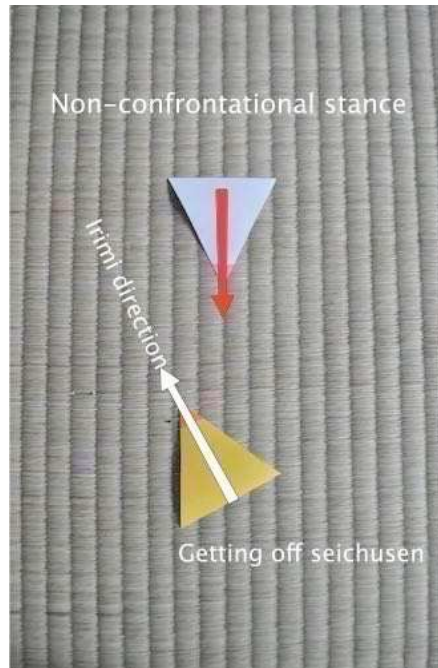


fig. 56

*Irimi* is one of the basic Aikido movements and means the process of entering the training partner's space (fig. 56 and 57). To do this, the Aikido practitioner must move off *seichusen* and drive through the opening.

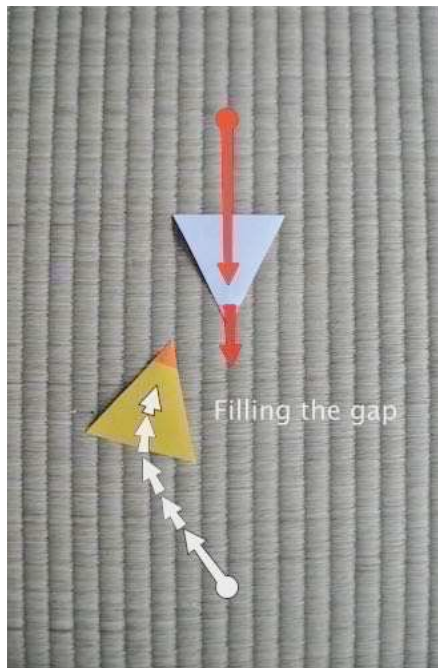


fig. 57

In this position, partners can sense one another's *ki* and two energy streams become one without confrontation (fig. 58. This blending motion is another key principle in Aikido.) *Tenkan* is a pivoting movement (fig. 58) to get into the partner's *shikaku* (blind spot, fig. 59). Therefore, the concept of getting off *seichusen* is very important to the nervous system onstage because *shikaku* remains unaffected.

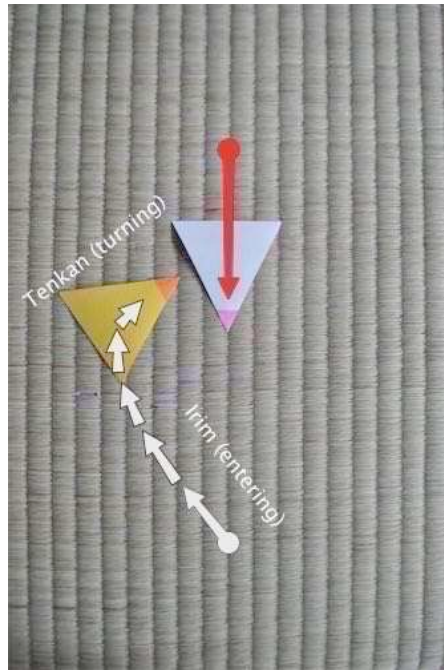


fig. 58

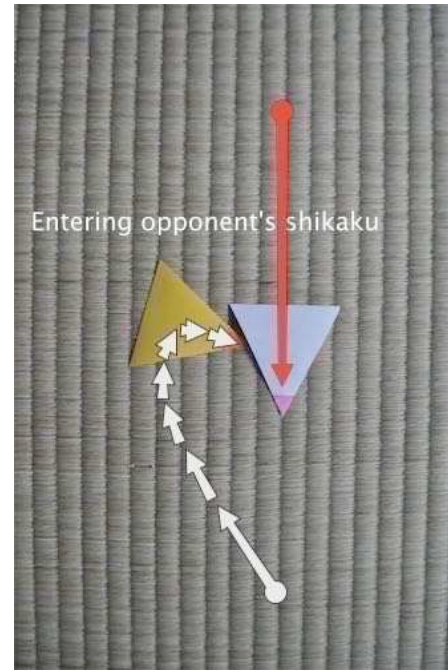


fig. 59

### Piano Placement Onstage

If the piano is placed directly in front of the audience in a horizontal position (as in fig. 60, i.e., the standard soloist placement), the pianist will be uncomfortable because half the audience is sitting outside her view with part of her *shikaku* exposed to the listeners.

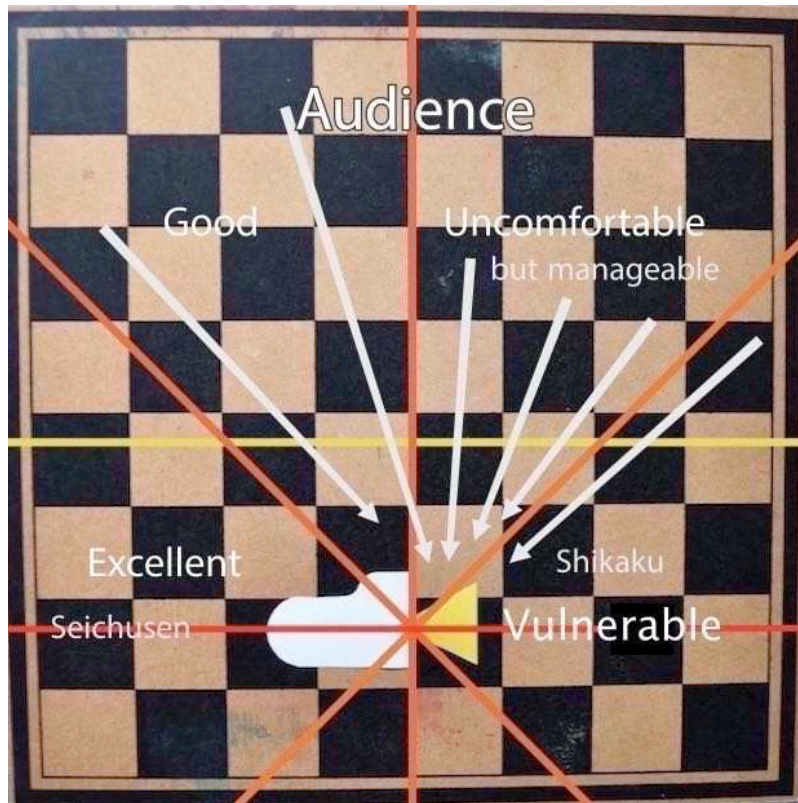


fig. 60

A much more effective piano placement is diagramed in fig. 61. If the piano is placed at about a 30-degree angle to the majority of the audience, the pianist will feel much more comfortable, avoiding *shikaku* entirely.



fig. 61

## ***Ki* Flow (Moment by Moment)**

The flow of *ki* is a manifestation of its continuity, and it is realized by body movement and breathing (*musubi*). It is very important that pianists feel the *ki* flow throughout the performance due to the very nature of music. That's why the use of *ki* as the backbone of the musical flow is a very valuable concept.

Perhaps without realizing it, pianist Leon Fleisher explained a type of *ki* flow when he forwarded the concept of the 'inner ear' during one of his master classes – "Hear before you play.... I think a technique is the ability to produce what you want."<sup>146</sup> This is a form of *ki* extension - *maai* - in Aikido, i.e., creating the space for the preparation of the flow (meaning, the flow is about to happen). Once the pianist hears the already imagined sound in the inner ear, then the flow is created. *Deai* follows when the pianist's finger is in contact with the keyboard, this is the meeting between vessel and instrument, according to Fleisher. Now pianist and instrument are as one and optimal performance is in the making.

This 'inner ear' technique must be incorporated with proper breathing, especially at the beginning of a piece or a phrase. A pianist gathers *ki* in the *hara* through inhalation while hearing the imagined sound in the 'inner ear,' holding the breath and contacting the key, then exhaling while the actual sound is sent out through the instrument into the performance space. In this manner, the musical flow is created by a combination of proper breathing and the 'inner ear' of *maai* before contacting the key of *deai*. The realized sound can ride on the unbroken flow of *zanshin*.

Similarly, musical composition feeds off the same flow. Toshio Hosokawa (1955-), a Japanese composer of contemporary classical music, described composition as it relates to this

concept: “After managing to compose the first few measures of music in some way, that first written piece of music generates the propelling energy to write next. What is important at that moment is to vanish the ambition to write a great masterpiece. Goethe said that that ambition diminishes the idea that wells up on a daily basis. To live humbly each passing day is the most crucial thing. The attitude to get the most out of every moment finds the way to produce a great work without realizing it.”<sup>147</sup> Hosokawa was overstraining himself to write great music, and that attitude disturbed the quality of his works. “There is nothing one can do better than writing what one really wants to write on musical paper while being in the truth of the moment. Once the momentum is created, the humble attitude of appreciating each moment fully becomes the natural flow of the compositional process.”<sup>148</sup>

Hosokawa’s experience taught him that his ambition was standing in the way of his creative flow and output. This gives pianists a great perspective: *Naka-ima*<sup>149</sup> is the act of dwelling inside of a moment of each and every sound. It is the propelling energy of creation. That is the flow of *ki*. In Aikido, when the techniques to establish *ki* flow are executed properly, it is effortless, because mind and body are relaxed and united. This unity creates a natural *ki* flow, where the sound (the partner) and the pianist are in perfect harmony. If the execution of the technique is not properly realized, there is a struggle, then tension, then stiffness in mind and body, and finally — no musical flow and MPA. What is significant is the mental state. “After one has practiced something for a long time, it becomes second nature. Relaxation and concentration go hand-in-hand. But too much concentration defeats itself. If one is truly relaxed, and allow the body and the unconscious to do their share, instead of working the conscious mind overtime, concentration can become effortless effort,”<sup>150</sup> according to the book *Zen in the Martial Arts*. What this means is that once a technique is well practiced, the conscious attempt to

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<sup>146</sup> Piano Virtuoso Fleisher on Overcoming Disability That Nearly Silenced Career  
[http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/entertainment-july-dec11-leonfleisher\\_07-18/](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/entertainment-july-dec11-leonfleisher_07-18/)

<sup>147</sup> Toshio Hosokawa, *Tamashii no Landscape, Landscape of Spirit* (Tokyo, Japan: Iwanami Shoten, 1997), 140-141. Translated from Japanese to English by the author.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>149</sup> *Naka-ima*, ‘inside-present’ means inside of now.

perform the music perfectly interferes with the flow and results in MPA. Since the conscious mind is preoccupied with the desire to do well the technique and to even concern what if didn't do well, most of the case breathing is neglected. Improper breathing is caused by anxiety. Therefore, breathing and *ki* flow are closely related.

*Ki* circulation is another form of *ki* flow. *Ki* circulation is similar in effect to blood circulation. When *ki* runs through pianists' bodies, it purifies stagnant *ki* in any parts, and also energize and rejuvenate their bodies. Morihei Ueshiba said, "In our techniques we enter completely into, blend totally with, and control firmly an attack. Strength resides where one's *ki* is concentrated and stable; confusion and maliciousness arise when *ki* stagnates."<sup>151</sup> Therefore, the uninterrupted *ki* circulation in their bodies is essential to execute optimal performance.

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<sup>150</sup> Hyams, 106.

<sup>151</sup> Ueshiba, *The Art of Peace*, comp. and trans. John Stevens (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2010), 145.

## **Ki Manifestations and the Audience**

In the book, *Zen in the Martial Arts*, author Joe Hyams writes, “The mind is truly a source of power, and when mind and body are coordinated, *ki* manifests itself. With practice you can turn *ki* on at will.”<sup>152</sup> This is the true essence of Aikido, and pianists can use it to decide what kind of *ki* they want to manifest onstage. *Kimochi wo komeru*, means to “invest one’s intention” in Japanese, and it’s an expression of a mindful gesture, i.e., to put one’s heart into an action. This is why it is so important for pianists to master, because there are many *ki* expressions in Japanese: *Yaru-ki* means “decisive,” *Tsuyo-ki* is “strong,” *Yowa-ki* translates to “discouraged,” *Yo-ki* means “bright,” *Tan-ki*, short-tempered, *Kyo-ki*, crazy and so many more. In these examples, *ki* can be understood as the energy, and it is important to understand how to deploy it in front of an audience.

This type of *ki* is perhaps better understood through its anecdotes. For example, it is often said that Ichiro Suzuki, a 10x All Star Major League Baseball player, looks like a short, skinny man on the street, but put him in a packed stadium, and the silver slugger, is known to point his bat in the direction of his home-run hit before he even swings at the ball, looms large. This is because of the difference in the *ki* expression he manifests in the baseball diamond. This concept of *ki* manifestation is very important for pianists to cultivate in terms of how they create the atmosphere in which they perform. *Ki* is expressed through their bodies, their movements, and their sound. By understanding the concept of *ki* expression, they can produce optimal piano performance through the manifestation of their intention.

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<sup>152</sup> Hyams, 63-64.

## **Confidence: Honest Self-expression**

The *hara* is believed to be a place where a person's most honest and truest self resides; their instinct, enshrined. This could be articulated through the expressions, 'gut feeling' or 'following one's gut.' Since confidence is a physical state expressed in the Japanese phrase, "*hara ga suwaru*," which literally means the '*hara* is determined,' it's important for musicians to cultivate it and make it strong and grounded.

"In lay terms, following one's heart, being true to one's deepest feelings, or 'following one's bliss' is a key to optimal functioning. Representations of the conflict between what one wishes to do in one's heart of hearts (e.g., being a poor but honest piano player vs. pursuing goals that promise more extrinsic rewards) are common in popular culture,"<sup>153</sup> said Chad M. Burton in his thesis, *Gut Feelings and Goal Pursuit: A Path to Self-Concordance*.

Burton suggests that when pianists find their centeredness in *hara*, where their authentic selves reside, and follow their 'gut instincts,' they may perform optimally. Conversely, when pianists are out of touch, their confidence fails as they become increasingly defensive and decreasingly creative. Once again, the critical mind creates doubt, anger and frustration, and enhances the prospect that MPA will run away with the performance.

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<sup>153</sup> Chad M. Burton, "Gut feelings and goal pursuit: A path to self-concordance," (dissertation, University of Missouri, Columbia, 2008), 1.

As author Joe Hyams states, “the *Zen* of martial arts deemphasizes the power of the intellect and extols that of intuitive action. Its ultimate aim is to free the individual from anger, illusion, and false passion.”<sup>154</sup>

From the Aikido perspective, perfectionism is a form of struggle, fighting, and resistance that gets in the way of *hara*, *ki* and freedom of movement. This tension in the mind ultimately affects the unification of body, mind, and spirit. This is why pianists need to remind themselves that their ultimate goal is optimal performance. By physically and mentally disengaging with the idea of perfectionism, Aikido provides a way to change viewpoints and support self-efficacy through basic *hara* activation exercises: Developing conscious awareness; creating centeredness, manifesting movement, and directing and extending energy. (These are in addition to gathering *ki* and loading it into *hara*, etc., as discussed earlier in this thesis.) The following activation methods are from the book, *Aikido Preparatory Exercises*,<sup>155</sup> by Morito Suganuma (1942-),<sup>156</sup> the last disciple of the founder of Aikido, who has an 8<sup>th</sup> degree black belt in Aikido. There are a total of 41 exercises introduced in the book, seven of which (1, 24-29), were selected by the author of this thesis specifically for pianists with full approval of the esteemed sensei.

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<sup>154</sup> Hyams, 10.

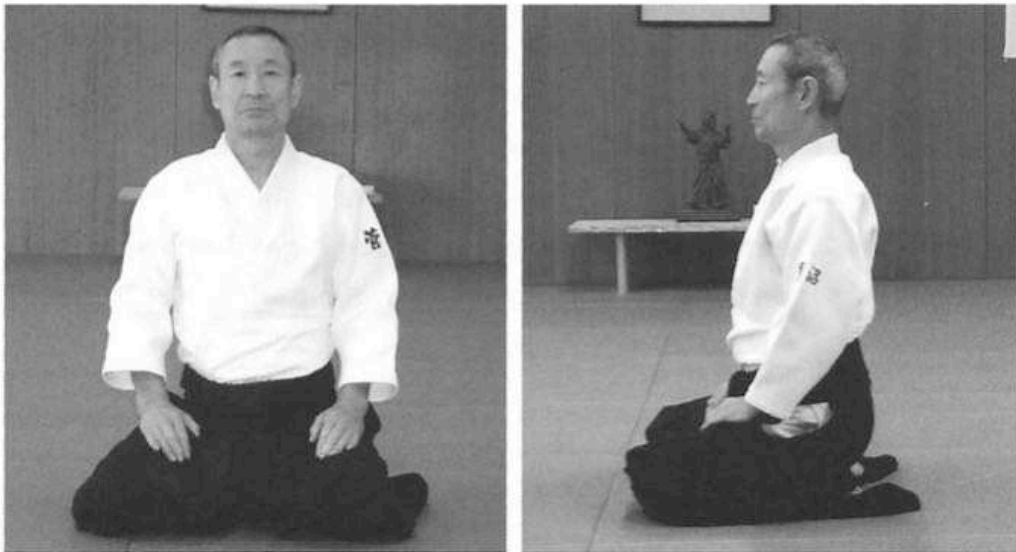
<sup>155</sup> Morito Suganuma, *Aikido Preparatory Exercises* (Fukuoka, Japan: Shoheijuku, 2012) “These warm-up exercises were taught by O-Sensei in his later years, in various forms and combinations at the Aikikai Hombu Dojo in the 1950s and 60s. These are an important legacy and a reminder of the importance of thoroughly warming up the body prior to practice,” according to “Morito Suganuma: ‘O-Sensei’s Warmups Alive and Well’” by Stanley Pranin.

<http://store.aikidojournal.com/morito-suganuma-o-senseis-warmups-alive-and-well/>

<sup>156</sup> Born in Fukushima, Japan, his first contact with aikido was in 1963 at the Asia University in Tokyo where he followed a class taught by Nobuyoshi Tamura. The next year, Tamura introduced him to the Aikikai Hombu Dojo where he started training assiduously under Morihei Ueshiba, Kisshomaru Ueshiba and other prominent Hombu instructors. He officially became an *uchideshi* in 1967 after graduating from university. On 19 April 1970, shortly after the death of Morihei Ueshiba, Suganuma was sent to Fukuoka by Kisshomaru Ueshiba as the Aikikai's representative for the Kyūshū district. He is the founder and *dojocho* of Aikido *Shoheijuku Dojo*, which today encompasses about 70 *dojo* and 4000 students. Although primarily based in Fukuoka, he is regularly invited to give aikido seminars around the world. Seminar locations have included Vancouver, Norway, the Netherlands, Israel, and Beijing. He received his 8th dan Aikikai in 2001. He is also a well-known *shodo* master and regularly practices zen meditation and yoga. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morito\\_Suganuma](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morito_Suganuma)

## **1** *Seiza* – 正坐 (proper way of sitting) or 静坐 (quiet sitting)

- 1) The space between the knees should not be too wide or too narrow (The ideal width is two fists wide for men and one-fist for women).
- 2) While keeping the back straight, push the buttocks out backward and the lower abdomen forward, and focus *kiryoku* (mental energy) in *seikantanden* (the body's center of gravity located right below the navel) and *koshi* (lower back).
- 3) Push the back of the head up toward the ceiling, and lightly tuck in the chin.
- 4) Relax the shoulders, ease the tension from your upper body, stabilizing your weight in the lower areas below your waist. You should feel stable and grounded.



## **24** Swing the upper body from side to side

Sit in seiza position, and swing the upper body from side to side.



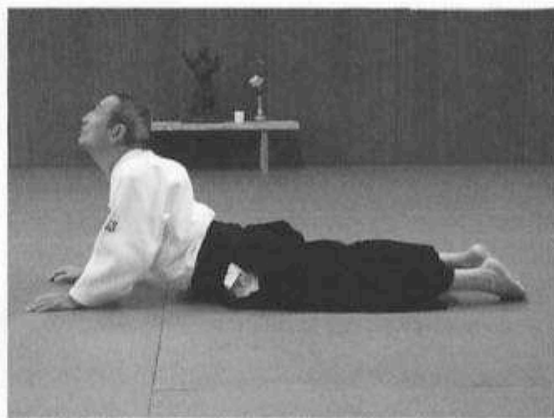
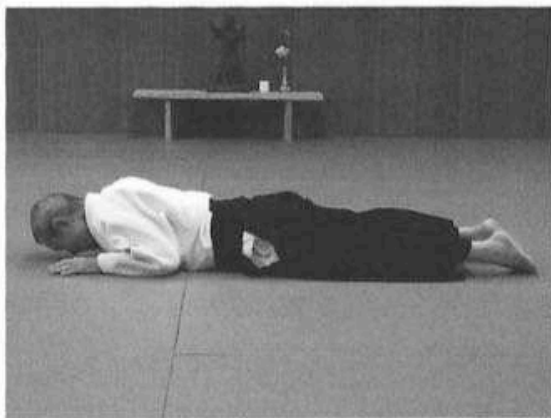
This exercise adjusts the distortion in the lower spine (lumber vertebra). It also helps soften knees and ankles.

**25** From the seiza position, lean the upper body forward, stretching the arms forward as much as possible, and lower the shoulders.

Apply your chest to the ground  
(if able only. Again, do not strain).



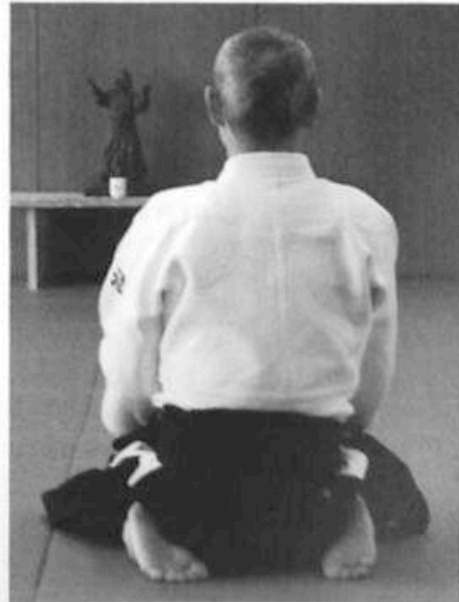
**26** Stretch the legs backwards, and slowly lift the upper body upwards



Keeping the lower abdomen on the ground.

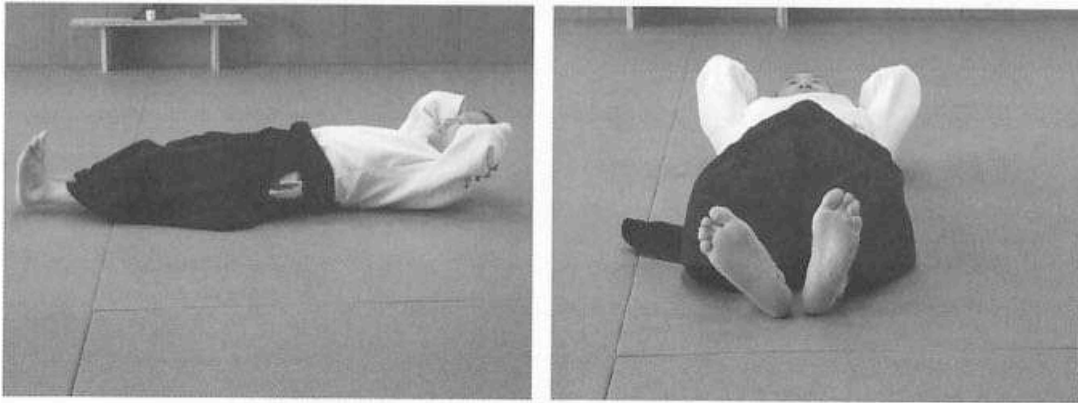
**27** Make the wariza position, and lean the upper body backward.

Wariza position →  
(sitting with the feet open and the buttock seated in between)



## 28 Kingyo undo (Gold fish exercise)

Stretch out the legs, hold the back of the head with the hands clasped together, push the heels out, and swing the feet from side to side.

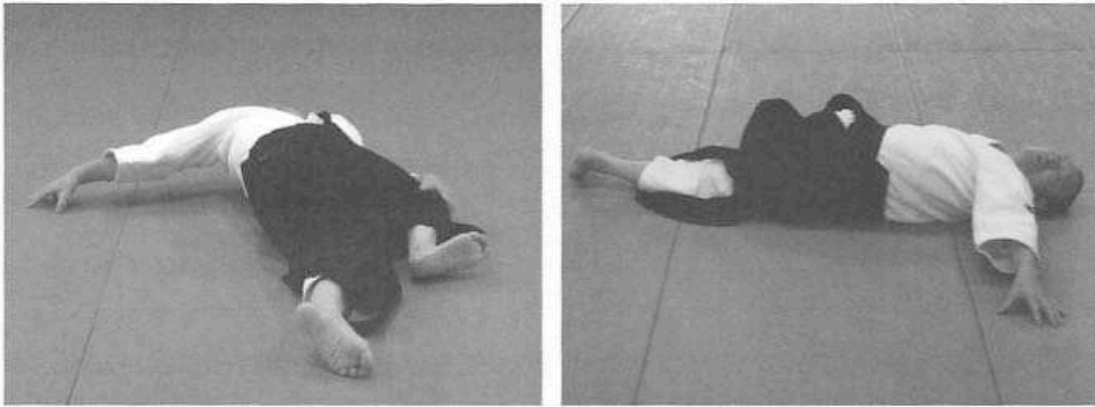


Swing right⇔left

This exercise adjusts distortion of the spine.  
It also promotes intrinsic functions of the bowels  
(Nishi-shiki Kenko-ho).

## 29 Hip twisting

Lie down on your back. Raising the right leg, bring the right knee towards the ground on your left with the left hand.  
Then move the right hand towards your right slowly, until it touches the ground.



While moving your hand, turn your face so that both hand and face move at the same time.

Practice slowly with exhalation, and do not do it by force.

Repeat on the other side.

## Conclusion

This thesis is the culmination of more than three decades of research, of trying to deal with and find solutions to MPA — all to no avail. It was an odyssey that began in the Japan of my youth and took me around the world before leading me back to the Buddhist and Shinto roots of my faith and the most Japanese of the martial arts.

Aikido is not only teaching me how to reach optimal piano performance - in and of itself the antidote to MPA - it also has helped me find myself again. After only four years of practicing this martial art, my thesis is finished, a doctorate and a black belt are well in hand, and I can defend myself in all arenas, most especially against the negative thoughts that once destroyed my confidence, almost ended my musical career and led to too many poor decisions.

To be sure, Aikido didn't miraculously make everything all better, but it did clear a path, a way out of a stuck position and into a happier life and an elevated art. This is because Aikido is about the refinement of our individual characters, about cultivating love, gratitude, peace and harmony - both internally and externally - by living and being in the moment. As Ueshiba said: "If people do not understand these principles...they will only think of winning, never wanting to lose, matching brawn against brawn, bullying the weak and the powerless. In short, they will take an aggressive attitude. To rid the world of aggression and contention is a purpose of Aikido."<sup>157</sup>

For me, Ueshiba's "bully" was MPA, the bodily dysfunction it initiated and the performances it ruined. And, true to Ueshiba's words, the harder I tried to fight it, the more defeated I became. As with any battle, MPA kicked my sympathetic nervous system into an extreme fight-or-flight stress response, resulting in a cascade of hormonal changes, shallow

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<sup>157</sup> Morihei Ueshiba, *The Heart of Aikido*, 97.

breathing, rapid heart beat, high blood pressure, inhibition of the lacrimal gland (salivation), muscle tension, auditory exclusion (loss of hearing), tunnel vision and shaking.

This is inevitably how MPA ran away with my performances, and it was entirely self-created - beginning in my mind, traveling through my body to the keys of the piano and ending in utter defeat. It's a trip that has spawned hundreds of "coping strategies" by musicians and untold thousands of theses and research studies on the physical and mental effects of MPA and its treatment. As a whole, I found all of it to be as ineffective as it was unending - the latter due to the eternal search for solutions - a merry-go-round of enormous proportions (most definitely a stuck position) and the exact opposite of Aikido.

Indeed, the reason Aikido so adaptive and universal is because it "is for correcting one's own mind," as its creator said, making it a practice tailored to the needs of each individual pianist. It is a holistic approach that unites mind and body through the spirit of *ki*, the astrophysical energy that passes through the waist of a horn torus, which is itself loaded into the *hara*. In other words, *ki* is an astrophysical dynamic energy flow process that is harnessed by every cell in the human body through proper breathing, the very thing that unites all living things at the sub-atomic level. Somehow, the ancient oriental cultures acquired this intrinsic wisdom - perhaps using what is now known as abductive reasoning - and called it (*ki*) the "spirit," which, to this day, forms the basis of oriental philosophy, religion, medicine, and the arts, including the martial arts.

Yet despite my Japanese heritage, it took me awhile to warm up to Aikido even as I was training in it. I could not find *ki* or *hara*, let alone unify my mind, body and spirit. The *mushin* mindset of emptiness, of not giving MPA a name, escaped me, as did any realization that I could blend with the energy of a training partner and use it to subdue violence. Nevertheless, I kept practicing and slowly the knowledge revealed itself via one breakthrough after another, just as

Ueshiba and my own *sensei* knew it would. In the process, I learned that MPA was, in fact, the result of an imbalance in my mind-body-spirit connection. By uniting them, I could clear my head and let the MPA slide through my consciousness like the notes of a piece of music during a concert - fleeting continuous *ki* flow - as my mind, body, spirit, piano and audience became as one in a magically sublime optimal musical performance.

This is how Aikido became my way of harmony — literally and figuratively. It is also the reason I've begun the arduous but deeply fulfilling task of adapting Aikido exercises for pianists as a way of nullifying the effects of MPA through the achievement of optimal musical performance. This thesis is the first step in that journey, a book will follow, and, very hopefully, an interdepartmental research partnership to prove what I already know to be true: Aikido is the way to pacify MPA.



Photo of Morihei Ueshiba throwing a man one-fourth his age and twice his weight with ease. He did it by employing continuous *ki* power. Pianists pacify MPA in exactly the same way.

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