

## Maintaining the Form

"Once you have form, you are no longer bound by it".

It is hard to over-emphasise the importance of maintaining form when executing technique. In the haste to throw, usually all the basic principles go out of the window: the shoulders raise, arm strength is used, posture deteriorates and the hips get completely forgotten. And even more annoyingly uke is still standing there despite your most vigorous efforts to throw them!

It is the biggest challenge for an Aikidoka to maintain the form under pressure. In order to maintain the form, the form must be ingrained into the Aikidoka. Most Aikido styles emphasise the form above everything: if the form is correct *it doesn't matter if the other person resists*. If you can't maintain good form doing kata or in randori training, then there is little chance of maintaining good form when you really need it.

Developing good form requires constant, hard, honest training and a lot of feedback from uke. In fact this is a hugely important point: uke's role in the development of solid form is fundamental - if uke doesn't have the right skills then you will never learn the right form no matter how much you train. Uke needs to give the right energy, whether it is with grasps, punches or kicks.

The form starts and ends with kamae. If the kamae is strong then the Aikidoka has a real foundation to build upon. Maintaining kamae during randori is about as hard as it gets and it takes dedicated training at what can be a frustratingly slow pace to build those foundations.

### ***Speed versus Form***

The illusion of speed is perhaps the biggest downfall for many Aikidoka. They mistakenly believe that in order to throw someone they have to do a technique fast. The frustrating truth is that as the form becomes more and more part of the Aikidoka the ironic thing is that the throws will start to happen of their own accord. As the form deepens the power becomes greater and greater. Eventually 'speed' is achieved; not by rushing the technique, but by seeing the attack early, being in the right place at the right time, robbing the attacker of balance and using the whole body to throw them. It is a matter of timing.

So how can good form be achieved? The following is the process used at Meikyokai:

1. Slow the technique right down - performing to a count is a very good way in the beginning.

2. Get the nuts and bolts of the technique right: tori and uke having their feet in the right place, hands in the right place, posture, energy going forward etc.
3. Uke must understand their role in the technique and give tori the right energy and/or attack sincerely.
4. Check posture at every stage of the technique: see if uke can resist you at each and every stage (lightly at first and then with increasing power as proficiency increases). If uke can resist then you need to re-examine how you are doing the technique - if it is right uke won't be able to resist. This is not easy but is the ultimate aim of every single technique.
5. Check that you are relaxed, and don't hold your breath whilst doing the technique (you'd be surprised!).
6. Don't worry about throwing! It is perfectly natural to want to throw, but you will progress quicker if you forget about throwing and concentrate on the form of the technique. The throw will eventually come naturally.
7. Put the technique together as a whole but still perform it at a slow pace: if you maintain the form and break uke's balance correctly it won't make the slightest difference - you will throw uke - and eventually anyone who attacks you.