

An equation: the Weapon and the Body

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In most martial arts, the union of the elements is a necessary and indispensable prerequisite for their effectiveness. Whichever one the trainee chooses, bringing together all the components necessary to perform a movement (displacement, attack, dodge...) is the only way to achieve a successful action. Whether it is with a weapon, or with one's hands or feet, the problem remains the same: to be effective. Dissociating the components from each other inevitably leads to a failure of the gesture, of the technique performed and, therefore, of the desired effect.

In an unarmed practice like Aikidô, the union 合 of energies 氣 is the very essence of this discipline: unifying our energy and the rest of the body through the HARA, and unifying our energy with that of your partner to become one. (I will come back to the notion of HARA later...)

In a practice with weapons like Jôdô, integrating the weapon (Jo) as a part of our body is not an easy thing at the beginning of your learning. It is difficult to make this wooden object of a considerable length the natural extension of your arms. To accomplish this, hours of training will be necessary and the practice of Kihon Tandoku will be an irreplaceable foundation.

I could multiply the examples with or without weapons, but in this discussion we will study the problem of the equation $1 + 1 = 1$ within the framework of the JÔDÔ SMR practice.

The TE NO UCHI 手の内

Let us start from the beginning. To unify the weapon with our body, we need a grip on it. This gripping, called TE (hand) no UCHI (interior), remains essential and must be fully understood. This is not often the case with a beginner, because he/she does not yet understand its importance. As Pascal Krieger Shihan likes to recall, "Later he will realize that this is the basic element for everything else to run smoothly".

Two types of Te no Uchi are used in the practice of JÔDÔ SMR: Honte and Gyakute. The first grip is used to cut (Kirite 切), the second to strike (Uchite 打手). As it can be seen, these two actions are not the same and therefore require two completely different ways of gripping. The teacher's role will be to take the time to fully explain the construction of each one and to insist on understanding this difference. Subsequently, corrections

should be made relentlessly until the beginner fully integrates these two types of holding the weapon.

Having to come back to it later in the progression would be a hindrance ... and he/she will quickly understand that: you cannot cut with a hand that “hits” as you cannot strike with a hand that “cuts”.

Once again, understanding their difference and then integrating these two constructions of Te no Uchi in the body is an essential part of the study and practice of JÔDÔ. And it is also the first step in successfully uniting the weapon with one's body.

The HARA 腹 and the SEIKA TANDEN 臍下 丹田

In Japanese, Hara means “the belly”; Seika Tanden, being an area located a little below the navel, is generally considered as the center of gravity of the body. Thus, we can say that it is the place where energies converge. Thus, each movement corresponds to a displacement of this center of gravity and maintaining the harmony of all parts of the body while moving allows a stable balance. This stability is a sure value which will allow the trainee to choose his/her movement (forward, backward, to the side). All these things seem obvious upon reading, yet many still find it difficult to move as soon as the bokken accelerates, thus often finding themselves under the cut.

Let us go back for a while to the importance of the Hara.... In our daily life, the belly is considered the center of digestion. However, some research on this area reveals that we are talking about a second “brain”: researchers have discovered the presence of neurons, the brain cells. Several streams of thought and other spiritual practices attribute to it a true energy-related value, a vehicle (passage) from the inside to the outside. It is this notion that is of interest to us here. Indeed, it is through this channel that one must feel the energy and transfer it to the weapon. All the power of the cuts and thrusts should not come from the strength of the arms, but rather from the energy of the Hara, concentrated and mobilized by the use of KIAI while cutting.

Thus, the outline of our equation sets in: the energy of the body is expelled at the Hara level and transmitted to the weapon through the Te no Uchi. The hands then become “the link that binds us to the foreign body (an adversary, a weapon). PK”.

The notion of HARA could be developed ad infinitum, given the great importance it has in Japan, especially in the practice of martial arts. It is not just considered as an energy crossroads and much less a simple anatomical region. It is something stronger, it is an Art: the art of the belly (HARAGEI 腹 芸). This notion brings together all fundamentals of Budô, such as Ki/Kokyu/Seika Tanden: the Ki carried by the Kokyu down to the Seika Tanden. Also, just as the Kihon Tandoku should be repeated over and over again, the emphasis in training should also be placed on the feeling and the work of the Hara. This

essential learning will add to that of Te no Uchi, to enable the success of the equation $1 + 1 = 1$.

The equation

On one side is the engine, the energy, the latent power, and on the other the tool, the weapon ready to go into action. The link between the two is the hands on the JO and the Te no Uchi. These, when holding the Jo, must find their place in the continuation of the Seika Tanden, that is slightly below the navel. It is essential to avoid a lower position than the hips level. There are several reasons for this. On the one hand, the Seika Tanden and the weapon would no longer be aligned and, on the other hand, a break in angle of the wrists would appear, which would position the weapon at almost 90° to the body. This break in the body-weapon axis would reduce our equation to $1 + 1 = 0$!

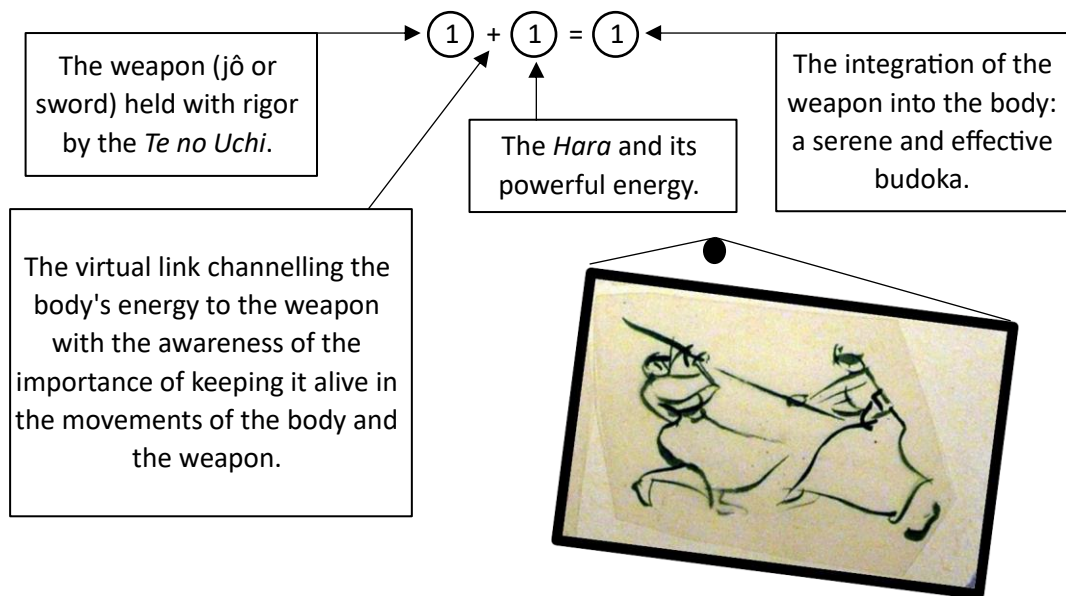
When taking Honte no kamae, the positioning of the left hand, at the same height as the Seika Tanden and detached from the body about the space of 2 hands, is the best way to create a link and a continuity between the body and the weapon, and this in order to permit the best possible circulation of energy and intention.

The support of the hands, i.e., the arms, will need muscular relaxation and unlocking of the elbows. Muscle relaxation, in the instant preceding an action, is a condition that must be sought and obtained at all costs. Then, releasing all unnecessary tension in the shoulders, elbows and hands will allow the whole body to be ready “here and now”. Here is another extremely important notion in the practice of Budô: Ichi Go Ichi E 一期一会. To be fully present, physically and mentally, to face any situation: to achieve that, freedom must take hold of the body. It must take hold of the mind as well, to be available to reflection and the resulting decision. However, above all, it has to take hold of the body. Feeling a freedom of movement, an availability in displacing the body, an erasure of all unnecessary tensions, all this will provide a feeling of calm and serenity necessary for the successful implementation of a possible attack or dodge. A sacred union must take place within the musculoskeletal system, a union where relaxation and tone must find the right balance.

Let us go back for a moment to the hands and their role as the link between the body and the weapon. We defined their position with respect to the body and, more precisely, in relation to the Seika Tanden, and their seizures corresponding to Honte no kamae or Gyakute no kamae. However, to maintain the spirit of freedom described above, let us look more precisely at the fingers. Strongly tightening all the fingers would have the effect of creating a blocking point on the whole grip and, by consequence, on the forearms towards the shoulders. To remedy this, it is necessary to dissociate the so-called “Force fingers” from the “Movement fingers”. Paradoxically, the force fingers are the smallest, i.e., the ring and little fingers. With their contraction, they will not only create the fixed point of the grip but also trigger the action of cutting with the weapon (Jo or sword). The remaining fingers – middle finger, index and thumb, perform more of a

guiding action and can release their grip, if necessary, during the movement of the weapon.

The equation $1 + 1 = 1$ seems solved.



What to conclude?

That mathematics is not my specialty, because I claim that $1 + 1 = 1$! And yet, there are many situations where this algebraic aberration becomes a patent fact. For example, when building a family, it is essential that parents become ONE so that harmony and stability endure over time..., isn't it?

To conclude this reflection on the body and the weapon, let us take a moment to reflect on the virtual link that unifies them. The success of the application of this equation inevitably requires not to break this link and the awareness of "being centered".

What does "being centered" mean? That the hands must not leave the central axis of the body. This means that the movement of the body must harmonize with the weapon in each of its movements. That it is not the weapon that adapts to the body, but the body that must adapt to the movement of the weapon.

Preparation is often necessary by a rotating movement of the hips, during which the hands will not leave the central axis of the body before they deliver a cut, thrust or parry. In addition, as I often say, "do all that you can do at home (on the spot) before starting a movement". The success of the gesture will also depend on the application of a golden

rule in the handling of weapons: Ki Ken Tai Ichi 気剣体一. Unify the body and the weapon within the same energy to land together on the target, safe and sound, because the body is protected behind the weapon. This situation will be possible, among others, if the weapon is not separated from the body, and does not create a delay in the movement of one or the other. Each movement of the hips must correspond to a movement of the hands, to keep them placed in the axis of the body and thus maintain the virtual link in function: Te no Uchi - Hara.

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