

From Conflict, to Contact, to Unity

by Steve Self • Durango CO, Jan 2007

The oak jo (50 inch staff) glided up and slipped over my partner's head. Then as I drew it down and back, he released his grip and fell to the mat grinning in puzzlement. There was no effort and no conflict, yet we had begun with him holding firmly, resisting any movement on my part. I was smiling too, not because I had overcome him or thrown him or defeated him. None of that was present. I smiled because it was easy, slippery simple and oddly rewarding.

Yet moving with non-conflict mind was elusive and new. Throughout this weekend seminar, each successful attempt built more confidence in my center and my relaxed mind. I was trusting the flowing emptiness in my one-point more and more; relying less and less on pushing and pulling, on clever vectors and skillful technique tricks. I was building momentum with this new focus and perspective, this unification and non-dissension, and with the momentum came more and more kinesthetic delight.

Like most learning curves, there were many moments of trying, doubt and error. It took so little to disturb my mind back to the ingrained, usual ways of conflict and separation, of power-over and force, of using my muscular advantage. Then, when my movements were ineffective or downright annoying, I would stop, give it up, and smile as I relaxed, dropping my awareness to center, abandoning trying and doubt, and moving in a fresh, *unified*, new way. My weekend was about building trust in one-point, trust in weight-underside, trust in extending ki, and trust in *moving together* with confidence. Correspondingly, I was disidentifying with engaging conflict.



I appreciated the methodology David Shaner Sensei emphasized: *first do it wrong*. So I would put my attention on the place my partner had grabbed, I would meet their mind at the point of most conflict. Then I would try to move it, counter it, overcome it. When that proved to be ineffective and unsatisfying, I would relax, and move from one-point center without fixing my attention on the contact. It was this repetitive disengagement with conflict that was oddly refreshing.

With each discordant effort I noted increased separation, isolation, force and inner annoyance. Even if I was successful in throwing my partner to the mat using strength and clever technique, enjoying the resultant adrenal glow of overcoming them, a kind of

arrogant superiority, I was clearly apart and in disharmony. By observing this aspect of my subjectivity, again and again, gradually it became objective, something clearly outside of my self, and thereby no longer an automatic response in my body-mind.

This was meditation in motion. Integrating somatic, kinesthetic and cognitive within one practice. Today's mind-body subjectivity observed, becomes an object seen by tomorrow's slightly more evolved subjectivity. Thus disidentification proceeds to wear away that which was me but is no longer me.

Shaner Sensei had written the seminar's theme on the white board: "fusoku-furi: no contact, no separation." As he spoke about it, I began with understanding it as "no conflict, no separation." At first, I could not get the subtle nuance of meaning in *no contact*, as I considered contact or connection to be beneficial in aikido. I thought, however, I

could approach Sensei's meaning by shifting the emphasis to *conflict*.

I began to explore what it meant, in the body, on the mat, with a partner, to move without separation and without effort, noticing when my mind wanted to join in the, oh so seductive, conflict, right at the grab. Then I let it go. I would return to my one-point center, smile and move without joining the offered contact-conflict. The distinction between connection and *contact* began to brighten. I noticed that *contact* actually had more conflict in it than it had connection. Contact was simply a more subtle level of conflict. Connection was a more gross level of *no separation*.

Seeing that part of the difficulty I had with *no contact* was my already-always desire to *do something to my partner*, to throw them. I was holding on to a vestige of conflict that was revealed in the word *contact*. I was still a subject, and my partner was an object external to me, grabbing me, that I needed to overcome, to throw. I was hardly *moving together*, or *unified* at all.

So, out on the mat, in the midst of falling, rolling and getting grabbed, I began to observe this subject, this me, that lived in this subject-object world, no matter how fleeting. This is the same subject (me) that would think about *moving together* as trying to get two objects (me and my partner) connected enough to essentially become one thing. In this perspective, I needed contact to try and combine these two into one. What a complex effort.

Then there was simply relaxing and moving from center, somehow the smile and the loose, heartening confidence opened a *moving together* that could not be figured out in a separate-self, linked objects, thinking mind way. It began to dawn on me that this too

was more about expanding subjectivity and less about effective physical techniques applied to objects. When I relaxed the boundaries of what I thought of as myself, when I let go of my familiar sense of limited subjectivity, and let my awareness envelope me, my partner, the mat, and the space around us, then a new level of *moving together* arose. When this occurred, the movements were effortless, smooth, unified and very enjoyable; we both would smile with pleasure and laugh even while rolling.



Of course I was new at this and many times I would *try* to make this happen, or I would push into the contact to *try*... And then realize once again that I was in dissension-mind, I

was separating myself and pushing objects around, I was in a space of doubting, and I would stop. Yet another moment to let go, release the inner holding, abandon myself and unfetter this contracted subjectivity.

It is an amazing experience to feel this radical expansion of subjectivity, this evolution of being, within the somatic, kinesthetic and cognitive dimensions *all together, simultaneously*. No longer is meditation *solely* a practice engaged within my inner consciousness. Integrating these multiple lines of development in a transpersonal aikido practice both accelerates and grounds my transcendent growth. I still meditate, still go to the dojo for aikido, but it all complements and resonates within; further dissolving the relative self.

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from the Denver Ki-Aikido Seminar
December 2006

