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THE MESSAGE TO READERS

I, Shizuo Imaizumi, became an Aikido “shidoin” at Aikikai Honbu Dojo in January, 1965. In those days I had wondered how to develop “kokyu-ryoku” for executing Aikido waza. The two words of “kokyu” in Japanese and “breath” in English are equivalent in meaning. The “ko” corresponding to the first part of Chinese character of “kokyu” literally means “to breathe out” or “exhalation.” The “kyu” of the second part literally means “breathe in” or “inhalation.” The “ryoku” or “chikara” means “the power.” Thus the word of “kokyu-ryoku” literally means “the power of breath.” As I compiled an article of “kokyu-nage” (irimi-nage) (see on pp. 2-8) in this summer issue, I would like to take this opportunity to introduce to you an essence of “kokyu” that I quote from an excellent article written by Will Johnson.

I extracted the well organized passages I needed as an essence of “kokyu” from “Breathing through the Whole Body” by Will Johnson, published by Inner Traditions (2012), which I found and bought at a thrift shop in Ridgeway, Co. in October, 2019.

“From our very first inhalation that signals entrance into the world to our very last exhalation through which we bid the world a final farewell, breath is with us our entire life. It is our constant and most reliable companion..., never abandoning us or leaving our side. It provides us—moment by moment, breath by breath—with the most vital nourishment we need to keep our body alive.... Breathing in...breathing out... So vital to our survival is the action of breathing that, ..., its rhythmic repetitions of inhalation and exhalation keep occurring whether or not we’re aware of them. While we have no choice but to breathe, we have the ability to affect how we breathe. We can slow the breath down. We can speed it up. We can cause it become fuller or slighter, stronger or weaker. We can consciously yield to its primal impulse and rhythms, or we can unconsciously constrain it and hold back its force. Breath can flow freely, like a stream in spring, or it can become stagnant, its current jammed....”

I anticipate that you have no objection against the above description of “kokyu” by Will Johnson. To develop “kokyu-ryoku,” you should first realize that you have the ability of controlling your own breath. For example, you can do it in a loud voice like “misogi” chanting or “kiai” utterance. Or you can do it in a silent sound or a voiceless silence like “zazen.”

Finally, to better understand the purpose of any kind of meditation training for yourself, Will Johnson suggests you one more point that helps you a lot in your “shugyo” or “spiritual training” as follows:

“Silence is a sound that you feel with your body more than [you] hear with your ear. You can feel its presence, but you don’t really hear its absence. In many ways, the purpose of meditation practice is to help us find this place of silent presence within ourselves. When you sit down in a quiet place away from the commotion of the marketplace with its din of commerce and conversation, it becomes easier to drop down into the quiet place in the center of your body and mind.”

AN INTRODUCTION TO DESCRIPTIVE AIKIDO (6)

By Shizuo Imaizumi

KATATE-TORI (KATATE-KOSA-TORI) KOKYU-NAGE (IRIMI-NAGE)

The following is a summarized article of “katate-tori (katate-kosa-tori) kokyu-nage (irimi-nage)” from the book by Koichi Tohei. [AKDNM-KT (1967), pp. 77-89]

Uke: Uke stands with the right foot forward (migi-hanmi) in front of tori, and grasps the right hand of tori with the right hand from the inside (katate-kosa-tori).

Tori: Tori stands with migi-hanmi in front of uke, and lets uke grasp the right hand. While tori is waiting for uke, he should keep the one point in the lower abdomen and extend ki through his whole body.

Tori: Tori first takes the left foot forward (hidari-hanmi) behind the right side of uke turning his “koshi” (a lower back) clockwise, and gently touches the neck area of uke with the left hand. Furthermore, tori takes the right foot backward clockwise behind his left foot, this time lowering his koshi and pushing down uke’s neck. In order to make uke lose his balance (kuzushi), tori should move his hands effectively, both with the right hand drawing a circle for leading the right hand of uke and with the left hand pushing down his neck.

Uke: Uke follows tori’s handling, and lowers his upper body as if he were bowing.

Tori: Tori raises his right hand from bottom to top pointing at uke’s face without stopping its flowing motion. At that time, tori leads uke’s neck with the left hand toward his chest. After that, tori thrusts down his right hand from the fingertips near outside the left cheek of uke. Although tori may take the right foot forward (migi-hanmi) behind the right side of uke [like a traditional irimi-nage] at that moment, that depends on physical positions of both uke and tori at that situation. In other words, when uke is completely led by tori and his body has already reached near tori’s right armpit, tori may throw uke without stepping the right foot forward.

Uke: Uke reacts backward, and takes a backroll (ushiro-ukemi).

Koichi Tohei suggests the following about learning the technique of katate-tori (katate-kosa-tori) kokyu-nage (irimi-nage). I would like to summarize several points below. [AKDNM-KT (1967), pp. 79-80]

(1) Uke tries to push the right hand of tori toward his shoulder. If the right shoulder of tori easily moves upward or his right arm is bent inward, that indicates that tori’s ki is not extending yet. Tori must keep in mind that he should keep the one point in the lower abdomen and extend ki when he executes a technique.

(2) When tori takes the left foot forward behind the right side of uke in his initial movement, he should take an action carefully. If tori pulls his ki out of the right hand even a little, that causes to receive uke’s ki so that uke can disturb tori’s entering action (irimi). Therefore, when tori takes the left foot forward behind the right side of uke, tori should follow a movement of “ude-furi-undo” (exercise of swinging both arms as wide as possible) of aiki taiso so that he can make full use of centrifugal force of his arms.

(3) After tori finishes taking the right foot backward clockwise behind the left foot, tori should face in the same direction as uke is facing so that he can push down uke's neck with the left hand in accordance with his footwork.

(4) When tori raises his right hand with its fingertips pointing at uke's face, a movement of his right hand should draw a circular motion. When the right hand is likened to a fire hose or a water hose in a garden, ki corresponds to water flowing inside a hose, and the fingertips of the right hand corresponds to a nozzle. Therefore, when tori raises his right hand, he should point at uke's face with his fingertips. When tori thrusts down the right hand together with the left hand pulling down his neck, the fingertips of the right hand should point at the ground from outside the left cheek of uke.

Koichi Tohei further suggests the following about how to practice Aikido with each other. I would like to summarize several points below. [AKDNM-KT (1967), pp. 80-85]

(1) When uke lightly grasps the right hand of tori with the right hand and doesn't disturb tori at all, tori can easily handle uke. Therefore, tori should first practice an outline of a basic technique like katate-tori waza as the Phase 1 of Aikido practice. On the contrary, when uke tries to disturb tori's movement from the beginning, tori cannot acquire a total process of a technique he should learn at the Phase 1. Therefore, both uke and tori should help one another to acquire a fundamental movement of a technique as the Phase 1 of Aikido practice. After uke and tori understood an outline of a technique, they should advance to the Phase 2 of Aikido practice such as resisting one another to some extent or applying for various situations like holding tight (ht) or coming to hold (c2h).

(2) For example, if uke firmly grasps the right hand of tori with the right hand, tori may reflexively stand ready to fight by putting his strength into his right hand. As that causes to make the flow of ki of both uke and tori stop there, tori cannot move his body further as he wants. On the contrary, when tori keeps the one point in the lower abdomen and relaxes his right hand completely, he can easily move his right hand and body. Therefore, tori should know that if he receives uke's power and tries to fight against it, he cannot execute his next action. When tori doesn't receive uke's holding strength directly, uke becomes confused about what to do with his own power. So tori should keep in mind that "Don't receive an opponent's ki directly."

(3) It is difficult to remain in a state of relaxing completely when someone grasps a hand. Experiment with each other as mentioned below. Tori stands with "shizentai" or "a posture in which tori stands with a shoulder width of both feet," and hangs down both hands tight. Uke grasps the right hand of tori with both hands, and tries to pull it down. Tori usually tilts his upper body rightward. Next, tori keeps the one point in the lower abdomen, and asks uke to do the same test. When uke pulls down tori's right hand, tori just thinks that all the pulling power is absorbed through the one point in the lower abdomen without receiving it to his right hand because he now relaxes his right hand completely. Or uke pushes his right hand upward. Again, tori should get the same result. Therefore, when uke grasps tori's right hand like katate-tori of Aikido waza, uke cannot push his right hand. Through these tests, tori should realize that he is strong enough by just relaxing completely. Now tori can move anywhere even when being held the right hand tight.

(4) Next, uke grasps the right hand of tori gently without holding tight, that is, keeping the one point in the lower abdomen and holding it with extending ki. In short, holding with ki means that uke doesn't hold with all his strength, but hold with his mind and body coordinated.

When uke grasps tori's hand like that, tori cannot easily move uke in the way tori did at the previous tests [refer to (3)]. Therefore, tori needs to learn the correct Aikido movement.

(5) The following is a step-by-step example as the Phase 1 of Aikido practice. As uke is extending ki and holding the right hand of tori with the right hand, tori should not pull his hand toward him. Tori first gives up moving his right hand. Instead, when tori relaxes his right hand without moving it, the remaining parts of his body don't be disturbed by uke, and, therefore, he can move any other parts of his body as he wants. Assume that uke doesn't move his standing position. So tori takes the left foot forward behind the right side of uke turning his face in the same direction as uke is facing, points the index finger of his right hand toward the same direction as both of them are facing, and then gently touches the neck area of uke with the left hand. At that moment, both uke and tori can avoid conflict with the power because the flow of power of both persons is moving in the same direction. Next, tori thinks that a central point between both of them standing now is the center of a circle. Therefore, both of them start turning clockwise together as if tori were drawing a big circle with his right index finger. At that time, the direction of tori's face and his right index finger coordinates with the same direction as uke is facing. After that, tori points his right index finger downward turning clockwise so that he makes uke lose his balance forward. Finally, tori points his right index finger upward continuing his turning action with his right hand drawing a semicircle upward, makes uke face upward by pulling down uke's neck with the left hand, and then thrusts down his right hand from his right index finger near outside the left cheek of uke.

(6) To better understand how important the direction of his fingertips is, tori needs to know the difference between both the correct direction and the wrong one regarding a movement of his own fingertips. Just before tori throws uke after raising his right hand, tori waits until uke resumes his standing posture with the right hand holding the right hand of tori. After that, tori experiments with various hand movements. When tori points his index fingers upward or forward during his throwing action, uke remains still without getting damaged at all. Next, tori points at uke's face with his right index fingers and moves down his right hand toward the left cheek of uke from outside. This time uke easily falls down without resistance.

(7) The final suggestion is how gentle tori should touch the neck area of uke with the left hand. If tori firmly pushes uke's neck, uke's ki immediately reacts backward so that tori cannot lead uke's body forward. On the contrary, when tori takes the left foot forward and gently touches the neck area of uke with the left hand full of ki. Uke cannot feel whether tori touches his neck or not. Therefore, tori easily moves uke's body forward. In other words, tori doesn't move uke's body with both hands only, but uses his whole body when he jumps in behind uke by a movement of both hands like ude-furi undo in aiki taiso.

SHOMEN-UCHI KOKYU-NAGE (IRIMI-NAGE)

The following is a summarized article of “shomen-uchi kokyu-nage (irimi-nage)” from the book by Koichi Tohei. [AKDNM-KT (1967), pp. 158-165]

Uke: Uke stands with the right foot forward (migi-hanmi) in front of tori, and tries to strike tori in the face (shomen) with the right hand thrusting out by taking the right foot forward (shomen-uchi).

Tori: Tori stands with migi-hanmi in front of uke keeping a proper distance (maai) against uke's striking action. At the moment when shomen-uchi happens, tori raises his right hand for protecting his face, takes the left foot forward (hidari-hanmi) behind the right side of uke turning his “kochi” (a lower back) clockwise, and gently touches the neck area of uke. Furthermore, tori takes the right foot backward clockwise behind his left foot, this time lowering his koshi. At that moment, tori strikes down the right hand of uke together with his neck pushing down. Both arms of tori should be moved up and down like men-uchi ikkyo undo of aiki taiso while his body is moving like ude-furi undo.

Uke: Uke bends his upper body forward like bowing when being pushed down his neck.

Tori: Tori further pushes down uke's body with both hands while moving backward.

Uke: Uke follows tori's action like drawing a semicircle moving around tori.

Tori: Tori stands up from his lowering posture raising his right hand upward in order to lead uke's ki, and throws uke backward by pulling down his neck. At that time, the fingertips of his right hand should aim at uke's face. Finally, tori thrusts down his right hand from outside the left cheek of uke.

Uke: Uke cannot move forward because he has been already controlled his neck area, and, therefore, only his both feet move forward. Finally, uke reacts backward, and takes a backroll (ushiro-ukemi).

Koichi Tohei suggests the following about learning the technique of shomen-uchi kokyu-nage (irimi-nage). I would like to summarize several points below. [AKDNM-KT (1967), pp. 160-161]

(1) When uke tries to strike tori in the face with the right hand, tori should stand still and practice raising his right hand with keeping the one point in the lower abdomen so as not to receive uke's ki directly with his right hand. If tori receives uke's ki when he responds to the right hand of uke striking him in the face, uke easily blocks tori's defensive right hand. Although tori moves his right hand like men-uchi ikkyo undo of aiki taiso, he should only move the right hand without moving his koshi. Of course, tori should keep his right hand with extending ki like an unbendable arm. As a result, the power of striking tori in the face flows downward along the right hand of tori and thus tori doesn't receive the striking power by uke. As “your mind moves a body,” tori doesn't need to take an action in a hurry. When uke wishes for striking tori in the face, tori reads uke's intention on his face or hand and simultaneously raises his right hand. At that moment, uke's ki misses its target and is in vain flowing downward.

(2) Assume that tori carries a fire hose for putting out a fire, and turns its nozzle on splashing water from a rubber hose uke is hosing near by. As the power of water between them is different, water from a rubber hose [as a uke's role] cannot break a flow of water gushing from a fire hose [as a tori's role]. As a result, water of tori's role repels water of uke's role. However, when water of tori's role gets weak or stops completely, water of uke's role can pass through the previous gushing water line of a fire hose. Therefore, tori should keep this example in mind, and practice raising his right hand naturally in accordance with keeping the one point in the lower abdomen and extending ki.

Koichi Tohei further suggests the following experiments (tests). I would like to summarize several points below. [AKDNM-KT (1967), pp. 162-163]

(1) Uke stands with the right foot forward (migi-hanmi), and thrusts his right arm in front of himself. Uke resists when being pushed down by tori. Meanwhile, tori stands outside of uke at the position of putting his right hand on the upper arm of uke for pushing it down from there. At that time, if tori puts his full strength on his right hand and tries to push down the upper arm of uke, he cannot easily push it down. Next, tori keeps the one point in the lower abdomen, relaxes his right hand completely, and then keeps the weight of his right hand underside. In other words, this is the state of coordinating with his mind and body. When tori tries to push down the right arm of uke from there, he can easily push it down because his ki is extending.

(2) Furthermore, when tori tries to strike down the right arm of uke after standing behind the right side of uke in shomen-uchi kokyu-nage (irimi-nage), he is apt to put strength on the right hand, and that causes a clash with the right arm of uke. Therefore, tori should keep the weight of his right hand underside like men-uchi ikkyo undo of aiki taiso, and swing it up and down naturally. Tori should also realize that he doesn't need to stop uke's arm. All he has to do is keep his mental attitude of just striking in the air by ignoring the right arm of uke.

(3) Tori must understand the true meaning of keeping the weight underside through the following experiment (test). Tori stands with migi-hanmi, thrusts his right arm in front of himself, and then relaxes his right arm. That is a so-called soft arm. Tori asks uke to stand outside his thrusting right arm and to push it up from underneath with his left or right hand. Uke easily lifts it up because tori is just thrusting his right arm gently. Next, tori keeps the one point in the lower abdomen, and thinks that the weight of his right arm is settled on the underside of the right arm. This time uke cannot easily lift up tori's right arm. If tori thinks that the weight is on the upper part of his right arm, then uke can easily lift it up. Therefore, tori should learn about how to use his mind correctly. The weight of all parts of a body normally remains underneath. When tori relaxes his body completely, the weight of his right arm should be settled underneath without thinking about the underside of his right arm. If tori wants to relax his body, he should keep the one point in the lower abdomen. If tori cannot do so, he had better think that "the weight is underside" like a mantra (a secret word). At that moment, the weight of tori's right arm is settled underneath and also his one point in the lower abdomen is settled automatically.

YOKOMEN-UCHI KOKYU-NAGE (IRIMI-NAGE)

The following is a summarized article of “yokomen-uchi kokyu-nage (irimi-nage) from the book by Koichi Tohei. [AKDNM-KT (1967), pp. 172-180]

Uke: Uke stands with the left foot forward (hidari-hanmi) in front of tori, tries to strike tori in the face from the left side (yokomen) with the right hand by taking the right foot forward (yokomen-uchi).

Tori: Tori stands with hidari-hanmi in front of uke showing him the left face clearly so that uke easily strikes him. At the moment when yokomen-uchi happens, tori extends ki from both hands facing to uke’s face, takes the left foot backward by twisting his “koshi” (a lower back) counterclockwise.

Uke: Uke’s striking action with the right hand fails to reach tori’s face, and that causes thrusting his right hand in front of tori without getting a striking effect.

Tori: Tori grabs uke’s right hand with both hands, first with the left hand from the inside following the right hand like holding a bokken. When tori takes the right foot backward near his left foot keeping a migi-hanmi posture, he releases his hold with the left hand and swing it backward for his next action. At that moment, tori’s weight should be on the left foot because he twisted his koshi counterclockwise, drew his right foot near his left foot (hiki-tsuke), and then swung his left hand backward. Furthermore, tori takes the left foot forward (hidari-hanmi) behind the right side of uke turning his koshi clockwise releasing his hold with the right hand, and gently touches the neck area of uke with the left hand. After that, tori takes the right foot backward clockwise behind his left foot, and pushes down both the right hand and the neck of uke like shomen-uchi kokyu-nage (irimi-nage).

Uke: Uke follows tori’s action like drawing a semicircle moving around tori.

Tori: Tori raises his right hand upward, and throws uke backward by pulling down uke’s neck. At that time, the fingertips of tori’s right hand should aim at uke’s face. Finally, the right hand of tori thrusts down from outside the left cheek of uke.

Uke: Uke reacts backward, and takes a backroll (ushiro-ukemi).

Koichi Tohei suggests the following about learning the technique of yokomen-uchi kokyu-nage (irimi-nage). I would like to summarize several points below. [AKDNM-KT (1967), pp. 174-176]

(1) When uke tries to strike tori in the face from the left side (yokomen-uchi), uke should extend ki aiming at tori’s face, and executes its strike by slightly taking the right foot forward off the front of tori. On the contrary, when uke strikes tori like that without extending ki, it is easy for tori to avoid its yokomen-uchi.

(2) When uke strikes tori in yokomen-uchi with extending ki, if tori pays an attention to only its striking right hand of uke and tries to block it, that causes tori various problems such as failing to lead uke’s striking power and to take his next action. Tori should first realize that uke’s right hand reaches his face sooner or later. Therefore, all tori has to do is wait until the right hand of uke is about to reach his face. In other words, tori extends ki toward uke, takes the left foot backward counterclockwise, draws the right foot backward (hiki-tsuke), stands with a migi-hanmi posture, and then gently grabs the right hand of uke with the right hand.

Figuratively speaking, the hitting right hand of uke corresponds to a ball of baseball, and the right hand of tori corresponds to a glove or a mitt in baseball.

(3) When uke gently strikes tori in yokomen-uchi, tori can handle that attack by taking the left foot backward and drawing the right foot toward the left one. However, when uke strikes tori harder by further moving his body forward, tori cannot easily handle uke's attack even though he takes the left foot backward in advance. Therefore, tori should practice the following footwork exercise repeatedly. Tori stands with the left foot forward (hidari-hanmi), extends ki from both hands thrusting out in front of uke [tori doesn't need uke when in this exercise], raises the left knee about the right angle, and then stands with the one leg. At count 1, tori slightly takes the right foot backward with its tiptoes (hidari-hanmi). At count 2, tori takes the left foot backward touching on the floor with its tiptoes (migi-hanmi). At count 3, tori puts the weight of his body on the left, and then draws the right foot toward the left one (migi-hanmi). Both hands of tori make a form like holding a bokken. The reason why tori stands with tiptoes of both feet is to spread his stance widely and quickly. In other words, if tori touches the floor on both heels, tori cannot take a wide stance smoothly. When tori moves backward, he is apt to absorb uke's ki easily. Therefore, tori should fully extend ki when he moves backward.

(4) Next, tori tries to reduce his counting of movement from counts 1-2-3 to 1-2 so that he can move much faster. Tori stands with hidari-hanmi. At count 1, tori slightly takes the right foot backward raising his left knee upward for the one-leg standing posture. At count 2, tori takes the left foot backward, and immediately draws his right foot toward the left one keeping his upright posture. After tori practices this footwork repeatedly, he should ask uke to strike him like yokomen-uchi. The moment when uke's striking action toward his face begins, tori takes a proper distance (maai) by moving backward like the above exercise. Next, tori asks uke to push his chest area after he moves backward in front of uke. If tori moves backward with his ki extending, he can remain stable there.

(5) The final suggestion is the importance of drawing the right foot toward the left one (hiki-tsuke) at the end of this exercise. First of all, a man cannot move his body quickly with both legs opening widely. For example, when tori just moves backward, and grabs uke's hand, uke can attack tori with other hand or kicks him easily. On the contrary, when tori draws his right foot toward the left one and keeps his narrow stance, tori can make space between them, but also can stretch the right hand of uke completely and make him lose his balance. Even though uke tries to attack tori from there, tori can easily handle uke, and he can attack uke anytime from there.

CONCLUSION OF SUMMER ISSUE

I have completed irimi-nage (kokyu-nage) through the spring and summer issues. This is one of the best techniques in Aikido. I hope you have enjoyed an article of the so-called irimi-nage.

In the next fall issue, I would like to introduce to you another kokyu-nage (ude-oroshi) from books by Kisshomaru Uyeshiba and Koichi Tohei.

<To be continued.>

