



1st Kyu Essay
The Importance of Being a Good Uke.

By Kieran Gourley

Good ukeship is immensely important for not only our own development but for the development of all those we train and interact with. O'sensei is reported to have said the secret to Aikido is ukemi. My understanding of this is that highly refined and skilled ukeship allows the principles and hence the essence of Aikido to flourish. To me the real secret lies in the ability of a good uke to allow everyone to progress toward the essence of Aikido at the most effective rate possible.

It is this reason why being a good uke is so highly valued.

The role of an uke is two-fold firstly it is to give the Nage enough sustained intent to allow a technique to be born and secondly it is to receive that technique as it is being performed.

As an exhaustive list of the benefits of being a good Uke would take up volumes. What I want to do is to take a look at a few of

the principles that I have found good ukeship to be tremendously beneficial for. Connection, flexibility and ki.

Connection is the most fundamental principle of Aikido. As a Nage I like to feel connection as an entering into fully with my Uke. This ability for the Uke to be able to 'enter into fully' is highly dependent on their skill level. If they do not have good ukemi then there is a high risk of injury and it is something I have learned to avoid. If my partner does have good ukeship however then I feel I can enter unconditionally into a meeting with them, I can really connect and magic can happen.

The real key for me however with connection is that being a good uke facilitates my partners connection to something bigger than themselves or their staying in state. In fact if done properly it can not only facilitate this connection but can heighten it to a level not achievable on their own. I am thus able to contribute significantly to the growth and development of others through my level of ukeship. To me this is a true and lasting gift.

Another important aspect that good ukeship allows us to develop is sustained intent or ki. The uke develops this through the intent of delivering an honest attack and to keep the attack on and even to reverse the roles should the Nage lose their intent. This can be exemplified by the statement 'nana korobi ya oki' or seven times down eight times. For the Nage it is developed through the keeping of extension in all movements as the uke tries to overcome you.

Good ukeship also develops flexibility in both the Uke and Nage. The more flexibility in the body the Uke has the more the Nage can enter into it and perform the technique fully without losing state. This means that the Nage is then able to change

direction and their intent instantaneously without having to overly concern themselves with hurting the uke.

For me the best way to learn a principle and hence point towards the truth in aikido is through direct transmission. Being a good uke allows me to train with more experienced partners at a higher level and gain insights that will progress my training far beyond what would have been possible without good ukeship.

Sometimes I find it easier to understand the importance of being a good uke by looking at it from the perspective of what happens when others or myself are not good ukes. Obviously there is the imminent physical danger that the Nage is put in if the Uke does not have the skills and the sensitivity enter into it at an appropriate level as well as the physical danger the uke puts themselves in. Beyond the physical though there is one thing I have come to learn about not so good ukeship and that is

WE ARE CONDITIONED BY OUR UKES

Thus our training and hence our means for progressing along the path less traveled is defined by the quality of our ukes. A bad uke will lock in bad habits, also conversely a good uke will help me develop wonderful habits that will last for a lifetime.

I know this through first hand experience as during my kyu grades I have conditioned my partners in ways that were not always beneficial. It is called “Doing a Kieran”, anticipating a technique and going where my mind thinks it should go. However, realising the benefits of being a good uke, I now know that I needed to cultivate the state of mushin, the state of no mind or being fully present. I realised the importance of this state of mind and that the uke needs to hold onto this throughout

the attack in order to gain the maxim benefits of being a good uke.

There is great joy that comes from giving ukemi to all grades. This joy itself is the reward enough for the years it takes to develop the required skills for ukeship.

The role of being a good uke is not just confined to the mat, it extends outside the dojo and tends to be an overarching set that applies to nearly all relationships, (none more so important than the ones under my own roof). It has tremendous scope for opening up my world of aikido and for deepening my understanding of each of the eight limbs of yoga. So if the skills that I learn in the dojo as an uke can increase my skills in these areas of my life then the importance of being a good Uke and the contribution that it makes toward leading a full, rich and abundant life should be self-evident.

Ps:

Being a good Uke allows me to enter more and more fully into life itself and to know more and more of reality, and hence I no longer have to sit on the sidelines and watch. It allows me to become as active a participant in the life I always yearned for.

PPS:

If we do not truly listen to our nages soul then we do not know who it is that we 'have asked to dance'. I as an uke must see past their actions and form to the very core of their being and facilitate the way that nature nutures. Take a mother as a role model.