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## **Suwari Waza Shomenuchi Ikkyo** by **David M. Valadez**

Suwari Waza Shomenuchi Ikkyo is like an Obento or a Japanese boxed lunch. That is to say, as the region from whence it came most often defines the Obento, so too is there a kind of locality that marks this most basic of basic techniques in Aikido. Depending upon the lineage, the dojo, the instructor, etc., Suwari Waza Shomenuchi Ikkyo can take on many forms. While the possibility for variation lends itself to the greatness of the Art, we must also concede that some of these variations are often flawed because they have strayed too far from the source-potential of the waza. In the end, it is not uncommon, even within one lineage, one dojo, or within one instructor, to see versions of this technique that are outright contradictory to each other. While it may often be the case in some Aikido circles to accept all variations as “valid,” the truth of the matter is that contradiction is a natural potential of any validity, and so contradiction must not only be understood as possible, it must also be understood as inevitable. For something to be valid, something else must be invalid. For a source-potential to allow for any kind of variation it must also allow for itself to be contradicted. Thus, the idea of a “valid version” implies, innately, the idea of an “invalid version.” The idea that all versions can be valid implies that no version is valid.

As we confront our waza under the light of consistency and/or contradiction, our intellectual faculties will be of the utmost importance. To be sure, the intellectual faculties of the practitioner cannot alone capture the totality of Budo training. However, the architectural design of waza is and will always be open to the scientific process. Thus, variation in waza design is open to both scientific understanding and/or critique. Regardless of the skill of the practitioner, which may even include a high degree to which the subject/object dichotomy has been reconciled, no waza can be deemed strategically viable and/or tactically valid, and thus consistent with its source-potential, when its architectural design violates reason. It is reason, or the consistency of principles that have proven themselves accurate, without delusion, sound, valid, true, etc., that supports the entire process of variation. Contradiction in design comes when this consistency is lost and/or when the proper respect for reason is lost.

So central is the notion of consistency in the architectural design of waza that it is only via a harmonious conglomeration of an art’s given strategic considerations, an art’s tactical tendencies, sound geometry, sound physics, sound physiology, sound biomechanics, and sound kinesiology, that we can come to know the source-potential of any waza. In other words, the source-potential does not come to us at first glance, or in and of itself. It comes to be knowable only when it comes to be the logical aggregate that consists of these elements, only when it possesses both an internal consistency and an external consistency according to this larger collective. The source-potential of any waza then is a synergistic conclusion that we find at the end of a process of reason.

As such then, it is quite easy for one version to “make sense” according to one or two aspects, say for example according to the science of physics, but then remain inconsistent with the source-potential because it cannot be deemed logically martial. The same can occur when one version remains martial but not in keeping with the art’s preference for choosing the strategy of Aiki over the clashing of energies. In the latter case, such a version might remain sound according to the science of physics, and, as was said, it may even remain quite martial, but because it does not afford significance to Aiki, such a version would be inconsistent with the art’s strategic considerations and its tactical tendencies, making it inconsistent with a technique’s source-potential.

What makes Suwari Waza Shomenuchi Ikkyo a key basic in Aikido praxis is that it operates at multiple levels. For example, on one level the technique is a conditioning routine. On another level, the technique harbors the clearest expression of how Aikido understands and seeks to apply Yin/Yang Theory both martially and spiritually. In the former example, to be sure, like all other Aikido waza, Suwari Waza Shomenuchi Ikkyo is not part of the modern self-defense marketing strategies that have people coming to “learn” and match various defensive reactions to various offensive stimuli. Rather, the technique is about forging a body/mind that is capable of being consistent with what the art has come to consider true, worthy, and of value. Hence, and regardless of any possible historical reasons for why techniques were originally done from a seated position, the Suwari aspect of this technique is geared toward cultivating a body that is centered, low, supple, flexible, and demonstrates great strength in the legs, hips, and core muscle groups. In this way, it also seeks to amplify to the practitioner any departure from what the art has come to consider strategically or tactically significant.

Through contrast and amplification, seated training alerts a practitioner to the fact, should it be true, that they are not centered but top-heavy, that they are not low but unstable, that they are not supple but stiff, and that they are not strong in the lower part of their body but over-dependent upon the smaller muscle groups that are often located in the arms and shoulders. Indeed, Aikido can be “practiced” and even performed (which is probably the more accurate word) by individuals who are top-heavy, who are unstable, who are stiff, and who make use of their arm and shoulder muscles – we have to only look around or even at ourselves to see that this is possible. However, these are not the ideals of the art, and thus these things are not consistent with the body/mind the art is actually seeking to cultivate within the individual. Hence, versions of Shomenuchi Ikkyo that might be designed around such things, or worse make use these things, will contradict the source-potential of Shomenuchi Ikkyo.

By a kind of displacement thinking and/or by a kind of “reverse engineering” we can see, by what is required to perform Suwari Waza Shomenuchi Ikkyo properly, exactly what we are to garner from such training physically. Similarly, by looking at what is required to perform such training properly, by looking at how we can keep all elements of the final aggregate consistent with each other, we can see what strategic and tactical considerations the art is deeming as valuable – we can see the source-potential of the technique. In this same way, we can see Aikido’s position on and application of Yin/Yang Theory in Suwari Waza Shomenuchi Ikkyo.

The Founder, Morihei Ueshiba, said that we should turn when pushed and enter when pulled. This strategy is based on Yin/Yang Theory. Yin/Yang Theory is a cultural watershed of East Asian thought. Any sense of balance, of harmony, of correctness, but also of health, of purity, of emotional wellness, etc., is understood primarily through the proper relating of Yin to Yang and Yang to Yin in East Asian culture. Hence, so too is the strategy and tactical application of Aiki. Aikido, born in an East Asian culture, having taking Aiki as its namesake, is no exception to this rule. Through his lectures, writings, and interviews, and by what we can deduce came to him via his mentors, the Founder has demonstrated that he

was very well versed in Yin/Yang Theory. He was a man of his times, a man of his region, and of his cultural circle. His statement on irimi (entering) and tenkan (turning), which was not of his creation, is a simple matching of Yin (turning) to Yang (pushing), and Yang (entering) to Yin (pulling). His statement is at the core of the source-potential for Suwari Waza Shomenuchi Ikkyo. This is one reason why Shomenuchi Ikkyo is at the core of the entire art – because Yin/Yang Theory is at the core of the art. In the end, any version that would violate a proper understanding of Yin/Yang Theory, or fail to make use of it, would contradict the source potential of Shomenuchi Ikkyo.

It is important to see the application of Yin/Yang Theory within the Founder’s statement. By doing so, for example, we can come to fully understand exactly what constitutes a push and/or a pull. A push then is not merely the shoving type action we are all familiar with. A push (Yang) is one part of a pairing. It is relational and/or interdependent with turning (Yin). A push is not only that thing that might cause us to turn or to want to turn; a push is that thing that makes turning possible. In the same way, turning is not only that thing that we want to do when someone pushes. Rather, it is turning that makes pushing possible. In other words, Yin/Yang Theory posits the universe as something that is codependent in nature. As a dependent in that nature, we too are subject to this codependency. Moreover, it is posited that this codependency pre-exists us. Hence, for our actions to be harmonious, and thus consistent with the art’s values (e.g. the application of Aiki), we must properly attune ourselves to this codependency; we must turn when pushed, we must enter when pulled. According to Yin/Yang Theory, the Founder’s statement is not merely one of advice. It is a commentary on the nature of the universe itself.

When we come to understand pushing and pulling as interdependent with turning and entering, we can come to create variations of Shomenuchi Ikkyo that remain consistent with the proper application of Yin/Yang Theory, and/or the source-potential for this waza. For example, we can see that “pushing” is any type of force or energy that we can turn around. It is not just the act of someone forcibly moving us away from them but not quite hitting us while doing it. Likewise, pulling is not merely the act of someone grabbing us and moving us closer to his or her body. Pulling is any force or energy that will allow us to enter. In this way, especially in Shomenuchi Ikkyo, a suki, or a hole or opening, which are all Yin in nature, can be considered a type of pulling – a type of energy that we can and should match with entering. While it may appear we have opened the door to an infinite amount of variation, because we are so broadly understanding pushing and pulling, limits are placed upon us because there are, for example, still some very real martial considerations to contend with.

In one variation of this technique, demonstrated from two camera angles for the reader in the video clip linked at the bottom of this page, the omote version of Ikkyo is sided with Yang. This means, Uke, at some point, must by the law of interdependency demonstrate some kind of Yin. Ikkyo omote here corresponds an entering on the part of Nage with a “pulling” on the part of Uke’s action. The “pulling” on Uke’s part is manifested as the Shomenuchi carries forth the Yin aspect of its own Yin/Yang interdependency. The Yin aspect of Shomenuchi occurs as the strike is rising into position (i.e. going up, going away from Nage) - before establishing its Line of Attack at the top of Uke’s head. This Yin is a type of suki, or opening, in the attack. We can and should match the Yang of entering (irimi) at the place/time of this Yin. As a result, it is by entering that this Yin is exposed for the opening that it is. In correspondence only do these two elements come to define themselves properly.

Invalid variations of this omote waza are brought about when this opening is not exposed for what it is and/or when the Yang of entering is matched to the Yang phase of the Shomenuchi strike (i.e. when the strike is traveling downward upon its now established Line of Attack, going toward Nage). Such variations are all violations of proper Yin/Yang Theory – they are a loss of harmony. In addition, as in any case, when Yang meets Yang, Aiki is lost and only a clash of energies remains. Versions that are marked by

such clashes show no awareness for the art's strategic considerations and/or its tactical tendencies. In the end, all such versions contradict the source-potential of Shomenuchi Ikkyo.

Note: Such clashes are often “avoided” by practitioners of these Yang/Yang versions of Shomenuchi Ikkyo by having Uke follow a choreography wherein they never enter a true Yang phase (e.g. keeping the “striking” hand at the top of their head and/or consciously turning away from the initial Line of Attack prematurely). With the burden of not clashing, and thus of blending Yin and Yang, firmly upon Uke's shoulders, such versions become inconsistent with the source-potential of Shomenuchi Ikkyo because they violate martial considerations (e.g. it is not martial to have Uke do the blending – it is only martial when Nage does the blending). Hence, and for example, because it is a tell-tale sign of the improper use of Yin/Yang Theory (especially in those versions where uke has been choreographed to prematurely turn away from the Line of Attack or in those versions where a Yang/Yang clash is clearly present), we should be suspect of variations of Shomenuchi Ikkyo that suggest we should or can control Uke's wrist during the Yang phase of entering. The reason for skepticism concerning such variations comes from the fact that the only way that Nage can reach Uke's wrist while entering is to enter when Shomenuchi has already commenced its Yang phase and/or to rely upon Uke to “blend” him/herself into a position where the wrist can be reached. Proper Yin to Yang entry has Uke's hand near or at the top of their head – out of range.

Another variation, one that does address the Yin/Yang Theory that lies at Ikkyo's source-potential, is to attack first, initiating the waza as Nage. This type of initiating is definitely a Yang move, one that, especially if the Yin opening is considered to be located somewhere in Uke's spirit and/or state of readiness, “forces” Uke to stay sided with Yin by having to “react” to the strike. I bring up this version as an example of a technique that can remain consistent according to one aspect of the source-potential but then be invalid by all of the other considerations that one must confront in order to gain total validity. Specifically, while this version is a matching of Yang to Yin, this type of training relies heavily upon choreographed responses – such that Uke is restricted to only reacting with Yin tactics. While limiting our attackers to specific initiating moves is something we must all work our way through when we make use of ideal phases, limiting our attackers to ideal reactions is a whole other world – a world of delusion that is very far away from the logic of ideal phases. To be sure, there are and have been many high-ranking practitioners that understand Shomenuchi Ikkyo in this manner. Moreover, it was one of the understandings the Founder held himself for Shomenuchi Ikkyo, or it at least appears to be one - based upon drawings, films, etc. Nevertheless, the fallacy of such thinking is exposed in the inevitable contradiction of its logic and execution.

While the capacity to sense pulling energies, or suki, or holes, in an opponent's spirit and/or state of readiness is indeed a martial skill worthy of possession, we lose all chances of obtaining this skill when we restrict our Uke to specific Yin reactions. If we as Nage can only “move first” because we restrict our Uke to moves that can only be labeled as “secondary,” then we are in effect sensing nothing. This is due to the choreography of Uke's reaction. Because Uke's is choreographed to a Yin reaction, his/her intention to initiate is never present. As a result, his/her spirit or state of readiness cannot be in possession of a suki or pulling energy. Where there is no attempt to initiate with an attack, there are no holes in one's “attack,” in one's spirit, in one's state of readiness, and thus there is nothing to be sensitive toward. Rather than cultivating such sensitivity, in such versions, one is negating all chance of possessing it.

Let it be clear, the martial sensitivity that is subtle or sophisticated enough to “see” an opening in an opponent's spirit and/or his or her state of readiness is something that should be striven for. What we should be critical of is manners said to achieve that accomplishment but that are by their very design subverting such efforts. In fact, it is in the first understanding of Ikkyo omote that we can actually

accomplish and cultivate this type of sensitivity. It is when we match the Yang of entering to the Yin phase of Uke's Shomenuchi that we can cultivate such sensitivity, precisely because such sensitivity is being required. It is when we let Uke attempt to initiate the action that we first possess the chance to "move first" by sensing his or her will to attack and his or her chosen option with which to attack. In this way, we "move first" but we are moving in relation to a cue that in the unskilled and/or the uninitiated goes ignored. In reality, we are still responding and thus blending with Uke (verses having Uke blending with us as Nage). Uke's attack or action is still valid because its choreography is still limited to the logic of ideal phases. That is to say, Uke's attack is still martially permissible because choreography remains firmly within an initial and single move.

Only this understanding of Shomenuchi Ikkyo omote truly requires the sensitivity we should value. This is because if we wait to see Uke actually move (in the physical sense), by the time we enter, the distance covered will have required enough time that we will not reach the proper range before the strike has entered its Yang phase. In the end, without this sensitivity being present and thereby cultivated, when attacks are thrown with higher degrees of intensity we will simply be meeting Yang energy with Yang energy. To properly match our Yang entry to Uke's Yin phase of Shomenuchi, we will have to respond to cues in his or her spirit and not simply to the gross motor moves that are an extension of that spirit. In short, when it comes to irimi, if you see the opening with your eyes, you are too late. Moving before any opening has presented itself is no solution to developing this skill properly.

The ura version of Shomenuchi Ikkyo must work along the same principles, though it goes about it by different means. As in omote, Yin and Yang must correspond. Since the waza requires us to turn, there must be something "pushing," something around which we can turn. As the Yin phase of Shomenuchi provided the codependent element for entering, the Yang phase of Shomenuchi will provide the corresponding aspect to the tenkan maneuver of Ikkyo ura. Such a perspective allows the omote and ura versions of techniques to be related to each other in very subtle but sophisticated ways. This is in contrast to the common and dangerously simplistic option of simply doing two omote versions (Yang oriented) or two ura versions (Yin oriented) in attempt to satisfy the omote/ura bifurcation.

To be sure, in the proper understanding of Yin and Yang, even at their apex, these aspects are never a hundred percent pure. That is to say, there is always an element of one aspect present in the other. Thus, it is necessary that we do enter, do contain some Yang, in our ura version of this waza. That entering will have to correspond to the Yin phase of Shomenuchi, just as the omote version did. We will also have to then make use of that sensitivity that allows us to respond to uke even before he or she has actually moved. Through that sensitivity, we will move in that space/time that is most difficult to describe verbally but that is quite easy to experience and/or to feel. It is that space/time where Uke has mentally committed to the notion of attacking but has not yet physically attacked. In that gap, the most ultimate of suki, Uke is spiritually at a "point of no return" and/or a point where "returning" would be the greater of two evils. As in omote, this is when we enter in ura. We enter, however we do not perform omote. In ura, we enter but we do not negate the Yang phase of Uke's Shomenuchi.

As we enter in our ura version, in order to stay consistent with Yin/Yang theory, and hence with the Founder's testament on how that theory corresponds to both tenkan (turning) and irimi (entering), it is most important that we do not shift our Uke into a Yin type of response. For us to turn, there must be something to turn around, and for there to be something to turn around, Uke must be in a Yang phase of energy transference. We cannot enter so deeply as to shift Uke's weight backwards and/or to interrupt his or her forward inertia. Shifting Uke's weight to the back hip and/or foot is clearly a violation of ura's application of Yin/Yang Theory, since such shifting is definitely Yin in nature. Were such a Yin actually able to

manifest itself, the tactical advantage and the proper application of Yin/Yang Theory would have Nage entering further, not turning. To tenkan when Yin is present is to retreat from the center of the technique. As a result, one is almost sure to have to pull Uke around in order to generate a new center at or around one's own point of articulation. This would negate the chance for Aiki to be utilized. This pulling, though it is Yin to Yin, still demonstrates a loss of correspondence, and thus a loss of harmony and/or blending. Though forces are heading away from each other, such a meeting of energy has to still be regarded as a clash and thus a loss of Aiki. Such a loss would mark such a variation as contradictory to the source-potential of this technique.

When performing Ikkyo ura it is imperative that Uke's energy be allowed to complete its Yang phase unimpeded. Moreover, it is imperative that uke be allowed to pass from the Yin phase of Shomenuchi to the Yang phase of Shomenuchi in a seamless fashion. This means that there should be no pauses and/or reversals in direction once Uke has commenced the strike. In ura, we enter only to meet with the striking limb, not to manipulate it. Having entered to that point in time/space, we correspond our turning (Yin) to Uke's strike (the Yang phase of Shomenuchi). In this way, we do not clash with Uke. In this way, we do not need Uke to stop his/her action. In this way, we do not need to place the burden of blending on Uke (which often goes by the euphemism of "following"). In this way, we manifest Aiki in our waza. In this way, we remain consistent with the source-potential of Suwari Waza Shomenuchi Ikkyo.

Technically, it will always be easier to meet Yang energy to Yang energy in Ikkyo omote. This is because such a variation of the technique does not require one to be mature enough in the art to demonstrate proper martial sensitivity and thus the proper timing. Technically, and for these same reasons, it will always be easier to do Ikkyo under the assumption that Nage should initiate the action – attacking first with Uke choreographed to reacting. Technically, it will always be easier to manipulate Uke's strike in Ikkyo ura. It will always be easier to put the burden of blending upon Uke's shoulders by suggesting that they should follow Nage. Nevertheless, such variations will never be easy when they are applied in real life situations, or even within highly intense training situations. Under certain conditions that may mark both real life applications and intense training environments, such versions may actually prove to be impossible. In addition, most importantly, they will never make sense according to the source-potential that marks things as consistent and valid. They will always fall on the side of the invalid, or they will always require that some aspect of the total aggregate be ignored, so that things can make "sense" in some sort of edited, warped, or corrupted way. The latter is an option that is most dangerous to the art as a whole. It is one we should with all our might take responsibility for never choosing. Rather, we should realize, we can and most definitely should analyze our waza variations to see that they do in fact remain consistent with the source-potentials of the art. Suwari Waza Shomenuchi Ikkyo is no exception.