



David M. Valadez
Senshin Center
Dojocho

The Nage/Uke Dynamic – Some Guidelines

by David M. Valadez

The following guidelines have been written up to provide one with a reference point concerning the living dynamic that is the Nage/Uke relationship. Note: These are just guidelines. All accurate understandings of the Nage/Uke dynamic have to be determined by specific contexts. Please use these guidelines in combination with the experience and insights you gain over the years of training when it comes to determining proper action within the Nage/Uke dynamic.

General Guidelines For Being Nage

Nage must always account, in terms of intensity and applied energy, for the following qualities when determining how to throw, pin, or strike, etc.: Uke's skill level, Uke's age, Uke's size, Uke's physical durability, Uke's current state of health and wellness, and the dojo's official position concerning the Senpai/Kohai model as it is relative to the Nage/Uke dynamic (see below). All things being equal, safety is the primary determining element for the Nage/Uke dynamic. Martial "reality," as (mis)perceived by any one nage is NOT a determining element to be considered.

General Guidelines For Being Uke

Uke must take on the responsibility for the following: To constantly learn, study, and improve one's ukemi throughout the whole of one's training so as to ultimately provide Nage with the capacity to perform various martial tactics at full intensity and with full applied energy.

Uke, in their commitment to the art of ukemi, in their commitment to their own training, and in their commitment to the dojo as a training environment, is to continually strive to provide the above option as the third and most desired option in comparison with the following two: (A) Nage must opt to pull out of a technique or to greatly decrease the amount of intensity and/or applied energy being used for the safety of Uke; and (B) Nage must carry forth with a technique at the risk of injuring Uke.

With all things being equal, while safety is the primary determining element for the Nage/Uke dynamic, it is Uke, NOT Nage, that is primarily responsible for that safety. In this way ukemi can remain the gateway and foundation to all Aikido training – both martial and spiritual.

In all cases, Uke is responsible for a sincere attack – this means first and foremost that Uke must at all time seek to cultivate sincerity within him/herself. With good form being the assumed given, it is sincerity, investment of the total self (i.e. body, mind, and spirit), that demarcates the martial from the non-martial.

Note that we train in and practice ukemi in order to experience Aikido safely. We do not train in ukemi in order to practice forms successfully. It is not Uke's job to make Nage's technique "work."

Uke's general priorities are as follows: (A) Offer a sincere attack; (B) Take responsibility for one's own safety throughout the given moment; and (C) Use all opportunities to further increase one's skill in ukemi.

At any time, and for any reason, Uke has the right and responsibility to ask Nage to adjust his/her rate of intensity and applied energy to suit current needs. This is particularly true when one is NOT training with Sensei but with a fellow deshi.

Understand: A dojo's overall health is directly related to how closely each Uke adopts these above elements for him/herself. Techniques can only be as martial as one is able to receive them safely. Within any given training environment, the manifestation of the Art itself is directly proportional to the skill level of Uke. There are no exceptions to this rule. Uke marks the quality of a dojo.

Particular Guidelines for Being Nage (General Guidelines Are Assumed)

Nage has different responsibilities according to what type of training is being practiced. In Kihon Waza training, Nage is to understand that he/she has a specific role to play in the form. As Uke is restricted to a given set of actions and/or reactions, Nage too is restricted to a given set of actions and/or reactions. While Nage should never force his/her technique upon Uke, Nage must not anticipate or rely upon Uke (in the carrying forth of their own role) to provide him/herself with a semblance of proper martial tactics, strategies, and virtues. Kihon Waza assumes that the technique is A GIVEN – an *a priori* – for both Nage AND Uke to experience. The technique, which includes both Nage and Uke's role, is there to be experienced as determined by the pedagogy of the dojo. For this reason Nage is not to stray from the general guidelines (listed above) even in the face of some of the more common and assumed "benevolent" reasons offered (e.g. "I'm trying to remain martial in my training.") Because Kihon Waza is a matter of experiencing a given form, and little else, all technical delineation (such as "the martial" from the "non-martial") is in the hands of Sensei – not Nage.

Particular Guidelines for Being Uke (General Guidelines Are Assumed)

Uke has different responsibilities according to what type of training is being practiced. In Kihon Waza training, Uke is to understand that he/she has a specific role to play in the form. As Nage is restricted to a given set of actions and/or reactions, Uke too is restricted to a given set of actions and/or reactions. Uke should not "resist" Nage's technique; Uke should not seek to "escape" Nage's technique; and Uke should not seek to cater the form to their own intellectual (mis)understandings, to their own emotional constraints, and/or to their own spiritual lackings thereof. Kihon Waza training is not an environment in which Nage has to "take" his/her technique, so it is not a place where Uke has to "give" it. Kihon Waza assumes that the technique is A GIVEN – an *a priori* – for both Uke AND Nage to experience. The technique, which includes both Nage and Uke's role, is there to be experienced as determined by the pedagogy of the dojo. For this reason Uke is not to stray from the general guidelines (listed above) even in the face of some of the more common and assumed "benevolent" reasons offered (e.g. "I'm trying to correct Nage's form by

exposing the openings in his/her technique.”) Because Kihon Waza is a matter of experiencing a given form, and little else, all correction is in the hands of Sensei – not Uke.

In other forms of training that have an element of spontaneity contained therein, such as in Kaeshi Waza, Henka Waza, Jiyu Waza, etc., Nage must seek to reconcile the ultimately false Nage/Uke dialectic. Nage primarily does this by exposing “suki” (trans. openings) in Uke’s training, by amplifying weaknesses in Uke’s body, and by reflecting the maturity (or immaturity) level of Uke’s spirit. Nage can do any of these things by capitalizing upon any and all openings Uke may have in any and all manner of ways, and/or by showing greater spirit than Uke during the prescribed training at hand.

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Considerations For The Nage/Uke Dynamic in Relation to the Senpai/Kohai Model (All General and Particular Guidelines Are Assumed)

When Kohai and Nage: Seek to execute reps that are complete in detail but intense enough and with enough applied energy to expand your performance envelope in terms of tactical immediacy and power. Take advantage of your senior’s higher ukemi skill by performing reps at as high an intensity as possible while never compromising any of the insights you have gained concerning good form. Do not seek to be “gentle” with your Senpai. Trust in their ukemi to keep your experiments with form and power safe for all. This is particularly true when partnered with Sensei during class. It is not rude, nor dangerous, to throw Sensei “as hard as you can.”

When Senpai and Nage: Seek to experience technical details with greater awareness by exaggerating, prolonging, and/or amplifying their architectural elements. Maintain authority in your technique at all times – your body and spirit should be one of all around control – no matter how “slow” or “light” you may be required to practice. Observe, note, and examine the physical, emotional, and spiritual reactions of your Kohai and adjust your technique and understanding of the training process and of the art accordingly.

When Kohai and Uke: Follow the above general and particular guidelines for Uke to the letter. In most cases, Nage will expect them of you. When partnered with Sensei, have faith in his/her skill, awareness, and knowledge to keep you safe at the same time that your Ukemi is being challenged by him/her in order to bring it to a higher level.

When Senpai and Uke: Follow the above general and particular guidelines for Uke to the letter. In most cases, Nage will expect them of you. Be sure to monitor your ego and the many ways it will try to cultivate more fear, more pride, and more ignorance in you through the lure and delusion of power. For example, be sure to never get “lazy” as Uke simply because you think you can; be sure to confront and reconcile all fears and prides that may come to you as your Kohai inevitably come to throw you, pin you, strike you, etc., at a level that will challenge and/or even overcome your ukemi; etc.

When training with a peer: Follow the above general and particular guidelines for Nage and Uke. In most cases, your partner will expect them of you.

Conclusion

In this way, over the duration of your training, you will come to know the hard and soft of Aikido, the light and heavy of Aikido, the fast and slow of Aikido, the mercy and the mercilessness of Aikido, and the form and non-form of Aikido. In the end you will have reconciled all of these apparent opposites by having the martial edge of your training remain sharp, preventing it from ever becoming dull, and indeed have it affect the spirit by purifying the self.