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Spiraling Maai by David M. Valadez

Maai is often associated with range. As such, it often comes to be related to or compared with other well-known theoretical breakdowns on range. In this regards, in order to gain insight into maai, many people might look to Bruce Lee's understanding of range or even Edmund Parker's Dimensional Zone Theory when trying to understand the mysteries of maai more clearly. Such an undertaking may in some cases prove to be quite fruitful. However, problems arise when maai becomes too two-dimensional because of such comparisons.

Maai, as it is employed in Aikido, cannot be reduced to matters of short range, medium range, and/or long range when it comes to tactical applications. Because Aikido's tactical architectures are dominated geometrically by the spiral, and not by pure linear or circular vectors, there can be no one-to-one attributing of basics with ranges. That is to say, unlike in theories where range is looked at as a matter of linear distance between two points, spiraling architectures make such mapping highly problematic when one goes on to note one particular distance as belonging to kicking, or to striking, or to trapping, etc. It is the nature of the spiral to make what is near far and what is far near. This it does because it is never alternating between just the X or Y axes independently. The spiral, rather, simultaneously employs those axes as it equally employs the Z-axis. As such, for example, one is often able to strike quite efficiently at a range that would be deemed "too close" by a two-dimensional understanding of range.

Maai is the best understood as "proper" or "right" distance/time. Time and Space always have to be considered interdependent when one reflects upon Aikido maai. We must do this because it is the situation, or rather the specific distance and time, which determines what is "proper" or "correct," and thus determines maai. In other words, when we are talking about maai, we are talking about the necessary relationship that must be present between Space and Time in light of an intent to execute a given tactic and/or strategy. There is a constant fluctuation in the manifestation of these things but a harmonious relationship must always be present between them. Therefore, maai would not solely be a matter of being at a safe distance, as is commonly understood, and/or of being out of range, unless those two things were one's intended tactic.

Tendencies to disassociate Time from Space when considering range often contribute to common misunderstandings of seeing maai as a two dimensional breakdown of range. Combat is a lot more dynamic than these overly simplistic perspectives can allow for. Thus, it cannot serve us well to measure things in a way that only makes sense within a situation where we picture two opponents standing in front of each other at distance "X," and then watch them close in at varying degrees of "-X" or move away from

each other at varying degrees of “+X.” I think this is important to realize no matter what one's art, but I think it is doubly important for one to understand when one's art makes ample use of the spiral in its tactical architectures.

The spiral allows us to strike, kick, throw, trap, pin, etc., at ranges not even conceivable when one only understands maai two-dimensionally (linearly). Aikido's spirals make such two-dimensional formulas irrelevant. In Aikido, via the spiral, we do not train for one range, or even for four or five ranges. Spirals, in their three dimensional structure, which itself can travel along any given plane and/or curve, and that can also be enhanced by the (possible) fourth dimension of Time, have us addressing the various tactical limitations of a given basic in terms of range in a totally different way than tactical selection. That is to say, when faced with a disharmony between the range one is addressing and the tactic one is trying to employ, different from opting to switch to a more properly fitted basic, a spiraling maai negates the “disharmony” itself. It does this by allowing energy to traverse through the three axes according to one's intent and/or design. As such, a spiraling maai allows that which is far but needs to be near to be near and it allows that which is near but needs to be far to be far.