

## *Ai-uchi vs. Ai-nuke*

*Ai-uchi* is mutual striking with the implication of mutual killing. *Ai-nuke*, on the other hand, is mutual escaping, literally “mutual passing through”.... To many students (probably some of these are in your own dojo), there are only two gears: ai-nuke (letting one’s opposite number pass through) or ai-uchi (fighting as if you were on a medieval Japanese battlefield).... Would the ai-uchi enthusiast be wiser to adapt an attitude of ai-nuke? Yes and no.

Ai-nuke (mutual release or mutual escape) is closer to the attitude accepted by aikido-enthusiasts. To be more precise, they want to become one with the flow of their opponent’s attack and lead him to his own destruction without adding any negative intent. This posits an ideal, perhaps, but in reality it is more than a little Pollyanna-ish. In the rest of traditional budo, however, this attitude of passing through should not be totally gainsaid.

There is a moral hierarchy in traditional budo, which if ignored, turns sport into self-defense and self-defense into aggression. When are you willing to settle for a mutual escape? I suggest that mutual escape is the essence of real self-defense and is one of the reasons that sport budo, to my way of thinking, should never be more than a tool of or an adjunct to traditional budo. Without detracting from the motivating power of a sport contest, let us recognize that the idea of winning in sport is to have one’s hand’s raised, one’s trophy case filled, and one’s photo in the paper. Being a winner makes one feel good about oneself, but it does not *per se* enhance self-defense. One may correctly argue that the aggressiveness, speed, and technical savvy one picks up in sport budo can easily be called upon in some self-defense encounters. I agree—that is why I think sport sparring should be some part of a traditional karate curriculum (or an art like Tomiki aikido), but that part should be a relatively small portion so as not to draw training time away from so many other aspects of traditional budo and, more importantly, so as not to convert the student to a constant ai-uchi attitude.

Self-defense may embrace the need to put Gorilla McTavish on the macadam wailing for Mommy McTavish, but it is equally self-defense if Gorilla is sent swinging from the nearest vine in search of another banana to pick. You are more likely to escalate the violence, or even the chance of violence occurring, if you have an ai-uchi attitude rather than an ai-nuke attitude. This means one has to have enough psychological self-awareness to balance, on one side, an ego that will not put up with being beaten up with, on the other side, an ego that does not have to beat up anyone else.

Many years ago, a student said that he had learned something profound from me—something I thought nothing of at the time. He had described a situation in which someone in a restaurant had taken a seat he had been waiting for. He had asked me what I would do in that circumstance. “Look for other seats,” was my reply. He admitted that he would have told the usurpers to move and would have punched them out if they gave him a hard time—he didn’t care if they were bigger than he—those were

his seats! In my opinion, he was a fight waiting to happen because his ego was not balanced between the ai-uchi attitude and the ai-nuke attitude.

One may readily make an argument that it would be unwise for him to let the incident go if the usurpers, because they thought they had found a mark, continued to demean him. Agreed, but by jumping to defend a seat in a restaurant with bristled bearing, one almost guarantees that one will have to use one's budo as a bat rather than as a way to improve oneself. Self-improvement means finding the You that interacts comfortably, ethically, and peacefully with the world as it is, fighting if one must, but avoiding fights if one can.

Ask yourself, "Do I fail on the side of ai-nuke or am I so afraid to fail on the side of ai-nuke that I fail on the side of ai-uchi?"