

Randori

The following are a collection of thoughts on the Randori exercise, a situation where two or more attackers are present.

Training for Randori is a complicated matter because it requires consideration of more than just the *nage* side of the exercise. Learning to take ukemi for a randori is a beginning for learning to deal with multiple attackers. While taking ukemi an Aikidoka can begin to develop a “feel” for what dealing with multiple partners is like. At this stage it is important to already be thinking about strategy and how to move in conjunction with your partners.

One point that should be addressed when taking ukemi is how to properly attack to best allow the *nage* to both learn and push themselves. It is not beneficial to simply run in and grab as hard as possible and not let go because this is not how an actual conflict occurs. By just grabbing and holding the *nage*, the *uke* incites a direct response (atemi to the face or groin) because they are leaving themselves open to attack. A grab should only last a moment before initiating a follow-up attack; by prolonging the grab it becomes impractical and just downright annoying. It is necessary to adjust this counterproductive behavior by establishing the proper role of the *uke* in the learning process.

The role of the *uke* is to challenge the *nage* by applying an appropriate amount of pressure through an ever changing volley of attacks from multiple angles. This diversity is what forces the *nage* to have to see the whole mat at the same time. Being able to see the “forest for the trees” is one of the most important and useful thing to come out of this training. Mentally stepping back from anything and seeing the bigger picture allows a person to have a perspective conducive to formulating a strategy. This idea is best represented by when a *nage* is in the middle of a randori but training for this can start while simply being an *uke*.

Ukes in a randori have an opportunity to develop a wider view and formulate strategy without being the one to fend off attackers. Randori has a ebb and flow to it and being able to see this allows both *uke* and *nage* to influence the scenario. One strategy for *ukes* is to constantly rush the *nage* and in the beginning this is a good way to get the person used to the speed and rhythm in a randori; it creates a simple baseline to work from. Another strategy to employ against an intermediate to an advanced student is to create more of a staccato rhythm by using a variety of timing, attacks and

angle of attack. This forces a *nage* to become less reactive and more proactive in responding to an attack.

Becoming proactive as the *nage* is one of the most important lessons in a randori because it teaches a person that he can change the situation he is in and eventually dominate it.

After establishing a measure of familiarity with participating in a randori as an *uke*, the transition into the role of *nage* becomes easier. One lesson a *nage* will grapple with is the idea of being able to accurately assess a situation. Randori can seem very chaotic so being able to organize information and establishing priorities from the very beginning, when the *nage* walks onto the mat, is very important. As the *ukes* take their positions, it is a good opportunity to take inventory of them by asking questions like: How big or small are they? Are they fast or slow? Strong or delicate? Are they all *yudansha* or *mudansha*? How skilled are they? Answering these questions, however profound or superficial, will help someone formulate a strategy. For example, a *nage* can think about going for the quickest moving *uke* and through him into the path of the slowest ones in order to gain a few precious moments before the randori officially begins. Or being able to organize the attackers in hierarchy of least manageable to most manageable and use the most responsive in order to block the difficult ones.

Creating a hierarchy or list of priorities allows a person to make more educated decisions on the fly. Sometimes it is best to move quickly past someone on to the person behind him because they are higher on your priority list may be beneficial. Someone can effectively change the rhythm of the randori by doing this as well since there is no rule saying that every *uke* needs to be thrown in turn. Switching between a big throw, a small throw, putting someone straight down, or just by passing him by completely is a good strategy to keep the *uke* guessing so the *nage* cannot be completely swarmed. Always being in motion, both mentally and physically, is a large component to strategy as well.

A thorough study of both sides of randori takes a lot of time and effort but can be very rewarding. Learning to properly attack and challenge the *nage* in a way that is more productive than overbearing is a good start to diving into randori. Using the time as an *uke* to become comfortable in a situation with multiple participants is a sound way to lay a good foundation for later practice. Strategy has more meaning than just throwing one person into another; it is situational awareness and being able to see the bigger picture then taking the information around you and organizing it into a manageable scenario. Move without

haste and be confident with whatever you do on the mat. If you don't know what you're doing then fake it 'til you make it. It just might work!