

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT: JUDO (THE ? WAY)

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When beginners are introduced to judo they are told that judo means the Gentle Way, which to many a beginner must indeed be a mystery. Because, upon looking around their dojo, most of what they will observe are activities that are far from gentle. But being new to the ways of judo, and the fact that all the people of authority in the dojo say it so, beginners buckle under and accept the definition. Usually, acceptance of the definition is in the belief that one day all will be revealed on how gentleness fits into the grand scheme of judo things. As judo experience accumulates it is found that there are moments when a throw can be executed effortlessly, and yes, even gently. But in general, most activities continue to require a lot of effort between the rare moments of effortlessness. So, is everyone practicing judo incorrectly or is the judo definition, 'The Gentle Way,' wrong?

The dictionary defines the word *definition* as: a statement of what a thing is. So if judo is to be gentle, the act of gentleness must hold true at all times, which it doesn't. The majority of successful judo skills are applied without gentleness and would never have worked if applied gently. To reinforce this point, the dictionary defines *gentle* as: soft, mild, soothing and tranquil. And if judo skills are applied in a manner that is soft, mild, soothing or tranquil, not too much is going to happen.

To quote Don Draeger,

*Dr Kano saw no conflict in choosing the term "gentle" and "soft" to describe Ju in Judo. But these words to the Western mind, have different Japanese connotations, which can be interpreted as "supple" or "flexible." Here we can visualize "the giving way" to superior forces.*

This "giving way" can be achieved either by using the force or momentum of one's adversary, or by capitalizing on conditions that one skillfully creates that causes one's adversary to move or react (involuntarily) in the direction that a throw is being applied. In all cases, this act of giving way requires movements that combine the qualities of adaptability, flexibility, suppleness, ductility, and pliability. It is in the act of applying these qualities that gentleness can occur. But again, in the quest for finding a true definition, does 'giving way' hold true for all judo applications?

If an axiom or definition is to hold true, it must hold true when encountering ALL circumstances, not for some circumstances. If a Tai-otoshi is successfully applied when uke is moving backwards, away from tori, then there was no act of giving way, because tori had to move towards uke, not give way to uke to apply the technique. Therefore, because the act of giving way was not present or required when applying the Tai-otoshi, the act of giving way, like the gentle way, is also not a true definition of the way of judo.

So what action can we pinpoint that is forever present whenever any throw or grappling technique is applied either, directly, combined, or as a counter, or when any act of grappling is applied, to overcome a defense or reverse an attack, to secure a hold, choke, or arm lock, whether the applying actions are fast, slow, gentle or strong? In other words, what action or condition is forever present when successfully applying judo skills to execute a judo technique?

An action, concept, or idea that fits all of the above, is "harmony." The idea of blending, moving, and synchronizing with a partner's movement is a definition that holds true at all times when

attacking with, or defending against a throw, hold, choke, or armlock. An objection to this definition may be raised because the martial art of Aikido is already known and defined as the way of harmony. This is because the founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba, correctly named his creation. But this was easy to pinpoint or define because when things work well they are known to work in harmony. This concept is at the core of every natural phenomena and manmade creation. When a person is in a combat situation, whether it be judo, boxing, karate, kick-boxing, Sambo, or Aikido, success is best achieved by being in harmony with one's partner. When two people are engaged in ballroom dancing or figure skating, success is best achieved when both partners move in harmony with one another. When a group, such as chorus girls or cheerleaders are all trying to be in unison, best results are achieved when each individual is in harmony with every other individual in the group. And finally, when the majority of citizens are in harmony with each other, a society functions at its best. All this is true because these activities take place on the planet Earth, which is part of our Solar system, which is in our galaxy, the Milky Way, which is one of the many galaxies in the Universe. Along with gravity, time, space, change, and gradualness, and probably some others, harmony is one of the absolute truths of the Universe.

So why be so concerned about a definition? What's the point? One point is for sure: this is not a suggestion to change the existing definition of judo. That would really upset the order of the Universe and the definition of harmony would then no longer apply. Besides, the suggestion would be an arrogant invasion on one of the traditional pillars of judo. No, the concern is to do with teaching and coaching. Focusing on harmony can be very helpful when applying it to two areas of teaching. First; when both participants are moving, explanations are made clearer and better understood when the concept of harmonizing with the other person's movements is reinforced. This could be when uke is moving in any direction prior to being thrown, when tori uses uke's attacking movement to apply a throw (counter throw), avoiding a throwing attack, transitioning to the mat to apply a grappling technique, and any grappling action that successfully leads to applying a grappling technique. Second; to instill into the student the practice of harmonizing at all times. That is, being in harmony with the other person as in the described activities above, and also during maneuvering and grip fighting; which is the majority of the time.

All of this will of course require a conscious effort. Harmonizing is a trained skill which in the long run will pay off. Initially, as a beginner, the tendency is to follow the law of self-preservation and block a throwing attack with stiff arms. It is at this juncture, the beginner, unless guided otherwise by his instructor, will embark upon a path of stiff armed, counter-productive judo. The alternative is for the beginner to purposefully develop a style whose movements are evasive, floating, unpredictable and blending, during the preparation for and the application of, a technique. This is the true path of judo, which is more enjoyable, safer, and follows the core principal of harmony.

Finally, Dr Kano often stressed that the main goals of judo were the mental and physical perfection of the individual, and the improvement of society through mutual welfare. It is perhaps here where Dr Kano believed that in the striving to attain these important goals that the attribute of gentleness occurs. But I leave it to the reader to conclude where the use of gentleness, giving way, or harmony actually fit in regarding the proficiency of applying judo skills.



*The avoidance skills of Kelly's Capers illustrate the concept of harmony*