

# No strength, no speed



*Fukushidoin Essay by  
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When you start teaching, many questions arise. The most basic of these being, “What do I wish to teach?” It comes down to a self-estimation of what you personally think you are good at and capable of transmitting.

Having been the only woman in the dojo for many years (and still we are few), I have been surrounded by big, strong men for most of my Aikido life. And believe me, some of these nice guys were and are a real challenge to practice with, purely because of the physical differences. But here is the thing: Aikido is indeed very well suited for women, because since you are usually not the stronger of the two practitioners during class, you are less tempted to try and use your strength (and if you do, you tend to loose or, as I once managed to do, you almost break your own wrist by attempting to move your arm with pure strength despite your opponent’s extremely strong grip).

## **You are strong, but I am technical**

In essence, in Aikido you use your opponent’s energy against him or her. This is one of the basic principles taught by O Sensei, Chiba Sensei, and up to my teacher. And yet – how difficult it is not to use force against force, especially if you have not yet understood the technique.

I am surely not claiming to be a great technical Aikido expert here, certainly not. But practicing with opponents being most often stronger than myself, my only chance is technique. By this I mean to say, my only chance is sticking as best I can to rotations, levers, etc., which require, above all, the first two pillars of Chiba Sensei’s five pillars of Aikido: centeredness and connectedness.

Since you sometimes weigh 10 or 20 kilograms less than your attacker, you should be quite sure where your centre is (to keep your balance) and where your attacker’s centre is (to imbalance him). This is the starting point, but you need to know this throughout the technique – just like feeling the connection. It is mainly the Uke’s job to maintain the connection, but you as Tori must react/adjust immediately if it is broken (as openings are created).

Keeping the connection is one of the most difficult aspects of Aikido, yet it is essential. When the connection is broken, it usually ends up in empty techniques or in force-versus-force-blocks. That is not Aikido.

### **Speed will come**

As assistant teachers, we stick to the basic forms and teach less advanced Aikido students. It is natural to demonstrate techniques at a pace that allows them to observe and follow closely. However, this is not the end of the story. Being enthusiastic, as most of us Aikidokas are, one tends to perform techniques very fast. In particular, when one is not very confident in the technical aspects of the movements, one tries to compensate this lack of technical knowledge with strength and speed. It may look fantastic, powerful, incredibly fast, but the impression can be deceiving. I am very grateful that our teacher keeps telling us to slow down when practicing new or more complex movements. "Speed will come", he says. And so it does – and so I wish to teach it as well.

Perhaps it is a bit "brave" (or provocative) to entitle a Fukushidoin essay "No strength, no speed". This may sound very non-martial, surely unmanly. Well, I would say that this is my strength and what me being a Fukushidoin could benefit the dojo and its students. For me, there is nothing more martial and self-empowering than feeling how, with the right timing, distance, centeredness and connectedness, I am able to throw an opponent who is much stronger than me. And this I wish to pass on.

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