

# Aikido: A Model for Brief Strategic Therapy\*

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*Building on Watzlawick's observations of certain similarities between judo and brief strategic therapy, this paper develops theoretic and pragmatic parallels between brief strategic therapy and a sophisticated martial art system, Aikido. After presenting the contextual similarities of the two conceptual systems as parallel "challenges" to the therapist and Aikidoist to effect change, the similarities in basic principles of practice are presented. The similarities in the philosophical and attitudinal positions of these conceptual systems are then delineated, followed by a case example that integrates the various concepts in the paper.*

Softness is the mind of a willow,  
Which turns the force of the wind against itself.  
Suppleness is the way to be strong,  
Learn, thus, its exquisite utility.

—Japanese odes

THE DIFFICULTIES INHERENT in developing a graphic conceptual model for brief strategic therapy, which is based upon nontraditional concepts, assumptions, and techniques, can be eased by drawing parallels to a comparable conceptual system. Such comparisons can provide different perspectives and help to achieve higher levels of conceptual clarity. In a side note to descriptions of their therapy techniques, Watzlawick, Weakland, and Fisch (11) and Watzlawick (9) note parallels between the approach of brief strategic therapy and the art of "judo," in that resistances are utilized rather than confronted. Such an observa-

tion is insightful and provides us with a useful concept upon which to build. However, a more recently developed and more sophisticated martial art, Aikido, appears to provide much greater depth and accuracy than judo as a conceptual model from which to draw parallels to brief strategic therapy. In this paper similarities between Aikido and brief strategic therapy are delineated with respect to their contexts, basic principles of practice, and philosophical and attitudinal positions. An integrative case example is presented at the end of the paper.

## Aikido

The word "Aikido" (actually three characters in Japanese) means the method or way (*do*) for the coordination or harmony (*ai*) of mental energy or spirit (*ki*). Aikido is a Japanese art of self-defense founded

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smooth, subtle, and effective, both functionally and aesthetically. The quick blending of forces makes indistinguishable the cause-effect relationships and makes apparent only the circularity of forces blended together for mutual problem-solving (neutralization of aggression and redirection of energies). Such a systemic approach is in accord with the humanistic ethic of Aikido, which attempts to eliminate the concepts of "enemies" and "bad persons."

Similarly, the brief strategic therapist always views his clients from a systems theory perspective, perceiving the client in relationship to other persons within a context. Problems are not viewed as residing within individuals, but in the interactions between people, in acausal, regularly patterned, systemic sequences of behavior. Once he accepts the challenge of helping a client to change, the therapist becomes a facilitator-contributor to the interactional sequence upon which he focuses his interventions (1). Using his unique "centered" position as leverage, he proceeds to direct the ongoing interactional sequences in a more constructive way. The therapist is best seen as a "verbal spinning top," maintaining his own conceptual balance while spinning off challenges, using reframing and distraction, and drawing on the client's motivation by speaking his conceptual language. After maneuvering the interactions of the clients to a successful resolution, he pulls out of the ongoing system of interactions, respecting the integrity of the system. Viewing people from such an interactionist position allows a therapist to function more comprehensively and humanistically. It compels him to be more aware of the consequences of his interventions on the lives of other significant persons in the client's life. It helps him to avoid viewing people as "pathological" (enemies) but instead to view interactions as potentially positive.

Hence, the circular view of causality in brief strategic therapy closely parallels the circular movements and circular orientation to conflict resolution in Aikido.

### *Knowledge of Attacks*

The practice of Aikido is not based solely upon a thorough knowledge and mastery of the Aikido techniques of neutralization themselves but also upon an equally thorough familiarity with all types and forms of possible attack, in accordance with the ancient Japanese axiom that "the very first requisite for defense is to know the enemy." (12, p. 45) The importance of having comprehensive knowledge of the attack by studying and analyzing the various parts, forms, and patterns of attacks is especially essential because the attack itself contains the very elements that an Aikido defensive strategy will utilize physically, functionally, and psychologically in neutralizing the attempted aggression.

An effective brief strategy therapist similarly must know strategies of human functioning well. He must be able to perceive the functional aspects of a variety of verbal and nonverbal behaviors. He must understand the paradoxical nature and functional use of emotions and ambivalence. He must be thoroughly familiar with and able to isolate and describe a wide range of interactional patterns and strategies that clients use in resisting change and in influencing family members, strangers, and therapists. Such knowledge is crucial because the therapist uses strategies similar in form to those of the client but extracts the functional aspects of these strategies and uses them therapeutically for problem resolution, rather than problem formation. (11)

### *Blending Without Clashing*

An Aikidoist never confronts or clashes with the challenger. Instead he accepts, joins, and moves with the challenger's energy flow in the direction in which it was going. Through such blending, resistance ceases to exist because the Aikidoist offers nothing for the challenger to resist. The Aikidoist does not use any external force or coercion but utilizes only that energy already within the challenger. Hence the Ai-

kidoist can successfully convert the potential resistance of the challenger into free energy in order to guide him into more positive and constructive directions. And this follows poetically with the humanistic and harmonious spirit of Aikido—"Aiki is not a technique to fight with or defeat the enemy. It is the way to reconcile the world and make human beings one family" (7, p. 177)

The brief strategic therapist likewise blends with the approach and style of the client and does not clash with or directly confront him. The therapist accepts and flows with the energy and direction of the challenge, thereby minimizing or eliminating the client's resistance. By offering little or no resistance back, the therapist can utilize the client's potential resistance as free energy that he can guide into more beneficial directions. Hence the therapist may talk the same jargon as the client, temporarily express acceptance of the same values as the client, or agree with the hopelessness of the situation, or even with the futility of therapy.

Both the Aikidoist and brief strategic therapist practice blending and bending, not defending. Yielding to the energy of the challenger gives both practitioners the strength of flexibility. As the practitioner yields, the challenger is simultaneously given permission to complete his challenge sequence. However, when a challenger is given permission to complete his challenge, the act takes on a different meaning and no longer seems so inviting. The challenger is left, at that moment, feeling empty, frustrated, and perhaps a bit scared.

### Extending

After the Aikidoist has blended with the challenger's movement, he allows the movement to reach its natural completion. He then *extends* the end point of the movement slightly further than it would go naturally, leaving the challenger off balance and vulnerable to an easy shift in direction of his energy flow by the Aikidoist. While

the challenger is in such a vulnerable stance, the Aikidoist has much power and control over the direction in which the particular sequence will go, and he can effortlessly guide the challenger to a successful resolution.

Similarly, after the brief strategic therapist has blended with the approach of his client (e.g., "I can fully understand why you are feeling so depressed, as you clearly have lots of reasons to be very depressed. . ."), he then *extends* the end point of the movement slightly further than it would go naturally (e.g., " . . . but I would like you to practice letting yourself go even further and get even more depressed than you are now. . . "). The psychological disorientation and confusion generated in the client by such a move is parallel to the physical disorientation produced in the Aikido challenger at such a point. The client at this point is off balance and vulnerable to a shift in direction of his (psychic) energy flow.

### Paradox and the Unexpected

The stance of the Aikidoist has numerous aspects of paradox. The moment that the challenger begins to approach with an attack, the Aikidoist, with open arms and open palms, "welcomes" the challenger. He views the challenge as an opportunity to learn more about Aikido and to practice it rather than as a dangerous or frightening event to be avoided. The "attack" is viewed as a gift of energy, and the transaction is viewed as a creative system of "joining" rather than one of conflict. The Aikidoist proceeds to demonstrate the element of surprise—doing the unexpected. He does not respond reflexively to a challenger in the more typical and predictable manner, as by running from the challenger, defensively blocking the attack, or attacking first. Instead, the Aikidoist approaches the challenger, joins the attack form, moves in close rather than pulls away, and redirects the challenger into a creative ballet-like encounter—and then off into vacant space. Needless to say, the challenger is puzzled

and intrigued by the stance. The Aikidoist "reframed" the negative to positive and will leave the challenger wondering what happened and how some resolution came about.

Similarly, the brief strategic therapist manifests many of the same characteristics. He comes, blends with the client, and he may even begin to deal with the client's problem. He gives directives intended to make the client feel better. Therapeutic improvement is given, the therapist is disheartened by the client's improvements "too quickly." Strategically, the therapist may be predictable. He is more than the pessimist, more than the neurotic, more than the behaviorist, more than the power of the unconscious. He expresses pessimism and the possibility for change to happen. He begins to change, rather than the therapist, paradoxically "slow" with any client's problems. The therapist may be more than the pessimist by requesting a "change." It is true for the Aikido therapy client that he is puzzled and intrigued by what happened, and is experiencing a resolution. Through the use of unexpected strategies, the therapist is able to effect maximum awareness, and minimize resistance.

### "One-Down." Stan

When challenge is a humble, innocent. Fam. Proc., Vol. 19,

and intrigued by such an odd, unexpected stance. The Aikidoist has, paradoxically, "reframed" the challenger's energy from negative to positive. Thus the challenger will leave the encounter unable to explain what happened to him, yet experiencing some resolution (change) of what brought him there in the first place.

Similarly, the brief strategic therapist manifests many aspects of paradox. He welcomes, blends with, and extends symptoms, and he may even create new symptoms as he begins to deal with the client's challenge. He gives directives that appear illogical and intended to make the situation worse for the client. Then, when the situation actually improves as a result of the directive given, the therapist may act puzzled or even disheartened by the client for making improvements "too quickly." The therapist, strategically, may act irrationally and unpredictably. He may show more pessimism than the pessimist, more neurotic behavior than the neurotic, and more psychotic behavior than the psychotic. Utilizing the power of the unexpected, the therapist may express pessimism to a client about the possibility for change as he expertly induces change to happen. Then, as the client begins to change, rather than praise him, the therapist, paradoxically, urges him to "go slow" with any changes. Finally, after the client's problems have been resolved, the therapist may bewilder the client further by requesting a "relapse" of symptoms. As is true for the Aikido challenger, the brief therapy client also leaves the encounter puzzled and intrigued, unable to explain what happened, yet feeling changed and experiencing a resolution of his problems. Through the use of paradox and unexpected strategies, both practitioners are able to effect maximum change with minimum awareness, and hence minimum cognitive resistance.

### "One-Down" Stance

When challenged, the Aikidoist assumes a humble, innocent, posture. He appears

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neither menacing nor threatening but rather relaxed, flexible, and harmless. Such a stance invites in and immediately disarms the challenger because of its unexpected lack of resistance. After the quick, effective, and harmless resolution of the challenge, the Aikidoist stands innocently in front of the challenger, displaying an unexpected humility before the great demonstration of power just made and, consequently, achieving a magnified degree of respect. Paradoxically, his power is born out of a no-power stance.

Similarly, the brief strategic therapist may assume a one-down stance. Being careful, strategically, to avoid getting stuck in the expected one-up "professional" stance, he may show pessimism at his ability to help the client. As he proceeds to develop his strategies, he may periodically apologize for his incompetence, inadequacies, and denseness. He may ask a father who is skeptical of doctors, "Do you mind if we proceed on a first name basis?" He might add, "I've never dealt with a problem quite like yours, and I'm not sure I'll even know how to help you. . . ." Then, at the resolution of a problem, the therapist may act innocent, humble, and naïve as to the reasons for the change. Finally, he gives credit to the client for making the changes and sends the client on his way.

### Pre-Emptying

A basic technique in Aikido is to move before an attack begins—as soon as the challenger mentally gets set to attack. When a challenger is intent on performing a certain action, he develops a one-track mind and since his mind then is already committed to a specific challenging movement, he is unable to react to the Aikido technique until it is too late. Hence, the Aikidoist begins to apply the technique when the challenger is raising his hand or pulling back his fist. At this point the challenger is highly vulnerable, his energy is drawn backward in preparation for the attack. His desire to challenge has thrown

him off balance and out of harmony on both a psychological and physical level.

Watzlawick (9) has coined the term "pre-empting" to describe a technique of brief strategic therapy that seems closely to parallel the Aikido technique. With this technique, the therapist anticipates resistance (a challenge) and makes a statement that pre-empts the resistance. For example, the therapist might say "You are probably going to think that I'm being stupid, but..." Pre-empting, thus, leaves the client off balance, disarmed, and vulnerable to accepting the therapist's directive, because not to accept it would be a sign of limited compassion, understanding, or courteousness.

### *Multiple Challengers*

Aikido can effectively be used with one challenger, but it can just as easily deal with multiple challengers. If approached by six challengers at the same time, the Aikidoist does not try to neutralize all at once. He begins by working on two at a time, subsystems of negative energy. He may turn and shift the direction of the first person's approach into the second person, who, in turn, makes it impossible for the third person to get near him, at which point he gently squats down and flips the fourth person over his shoulder, who then rolls into the fifth person, blocking the sixth person from getting near him. While spinning in circular, fluid movements, the Aikidoist effortlessly utilizes the challengers' own energy and actions to generate the particular strategies used.

Similarly, a brief strategic therapist would make just such an intervention in a family system. He would pit and pair one or two family members against each other until each subsystem of the larger family system has been dealt with sufficiently to effect a major change in the family system that maintains the symptomatic behavior (an example follows later).

Having a systems view of challenges allows one to deal as effectively with one

person as with a group of persons because the level of conceptualization and resulting types of techniques used do not change when performing either Aikido or brief strategic therapy.

### *Similarities in Philosophical and Attitudinal Positions*

#### *The Illusion of Simplicity*

Although the fundamental effective techniques of Aikido are simple to learn and use for basic self-defense, Aikido is much more than simply a set of techniques. It is a disciplined, philosophical stance on life grounded in a solid set of optimistic, respectful, humanistic values. Individuals are viewed in harmonious relationships with one another, and a deep appreciation exists for the coexistence of opposites in balanced relationships as the natural order of the universe. Mastery of the attitude and "stance" of Aikido requires many years of disciplined, committed practice. And, mastery of Aikido is never actually achieved, only approximated. For example, there is a seemingly simple technique of Aikido ("Kokyu nage") called "the 20-year technique." Although beginning students of Aikido can demonstrate the technique in a mechanical way, only a student of 20 years can demonstrate it in its exquisitely aesthetic intended form. Finally, even Master Morihei Uyeshiba, the founder of Aikido, claimed before his death that he was "just a beginning student of Aikido."

Casual observers of brief strategic therapy similarly may believe it to be merely a set of gimmicks or simple tricks for changing behavior. It, too, appears to be deceptively simple. However, even though the theory of brief strategic therapy is in its infancy, there already exists a solid groundwork of philosophical and attitudinal assumptions that are strikingly similar to those of Aikido. The attitudinal stance includes deep mutual respect for the basic goodness of all people and for their differences, a solid conceptual grasp of systems theory, and a deep appreciation of the roots

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### *Eclectic Flexibility*

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and solutions for individual problems within their interactional contexts. Moreover, there is a deep respect for and appreciation of paradox as an essential element of human functioning. (2, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11). Although beginning students of brief strategic therapy can demonstrate skill in temporary behavior change, disciplined, lengthy training and practice are required in order to approximate mastery of the approach and yield long-lasting problem resolution and systems change.

### *Eclectic Flexibility*

Aikido is the synthesis of a great many martial arts (including judo, ju-jitsu, sword, spear, and staff arts, etc.) and of the tenets of a number of Eastern spiritual disciplines (including Buddhist and Shinto traditions). Being a completely defensive and responsive art, it flexibly and pragmatically utilizes elements from many other martial arts in order to achieve its central goals—the harmless neutralization of aggression and the establishment of harmony.

Any theoretical or technical rigidity would hamper the flexibility necessary to receive a challenge of any sort from *any* direction. Based upon a rapid assessment of the particular positions, movements, timing, sequence, systemic interactions, and styles of the challengers, the Aikidoist selects the particular strategies to use for achieving constructive neutralization. In its ideal form, the nature of the challenge determines the nature of the Aikido strategy used.

Similarly, brief strategic therapy is flexibly eclectic. Its goal also is to achieve harmonious problem resolution among clients. In order to allow for maximum receptivity to the client's style (behavioral, cognitive, and emotional), and maximum effectiveness of interventions, an eclectic, flexible stance is necessary. Excessive technical rigidity limits receptivity to the client's style of problem-solving. It requires the client, implicitly and explicitly, to consent to deal with his problems conceptually, linguisti-

cally, and technically, within the therapist's framework only. A client who does not give such consent and who persistently resists change would, by traditional therapists, be labeled "untreatable." Such tautological labeling often reflects an inflexibility of the therapist to accommodate his therapeutic style and language to that of the client, rather than vice versa. This would be equivalent to a martial artist who required his challenger to attack only with punches to the left side of his body because he only defended himself against such attacks and refused to deal with right or center attacks, claiming "the attacker isn't attacking correctly."

In both brief strategic therapy and Aikido, it is ideal if the practitioner is willing to accept *any* attack or challenge coming from *any* direction, in *any* form and be able to neutralize the negative energy or redirect it as positive energy into more constructive, humanistic directions.

### *Potential Harm*

Because Aikido is so flexible, eclectic, responsive, and therefore so powerful, it has the potential for harm. By using the basic form of Aikido and including strategies from other more offensive approaches, a practitioner could easily injure or kill a challenger. There exist levels of applying the techniques, from very heavy, lethal levels to very light, harmless levels. The determinants of the particular level used are basically (a) the skill and control of the practitioner, and (b) the ethical intention of the practitioner. The highest levels of ethics in Aikido require that no harm result. As pointed out by Westbrook and Ratti (12, p. 34), "A man must sincerely desire to defend himself without hurting others." This is safeguarded by one of the "Rules During Practice" that are posted at the Aikido Headquarter's Gymnasium in Tokyo. The rule states: "All Aikido arts are secret in nature and are not to be revealed publicly, nor taught to rogues who will use them for evil purposes." (7, p. 174)



gies are so paradoxical, subtle, and confusing that an observer may chuckle at the novelty of the sequence. Moreover, during a particular maneuver, an Aikidoist might well tickle his challenger as he is guiding him through the multiple circular motions. Occasionally, even a challenger comes to laugh after being harmlessly maneuvered through a confusing sequence of disorienting motions.

Similarly, there is a real sense of humor and lightness in brief strategic therapy practice. In maneuvering a client through a sequence of paradoxical strategies, the therapist stimulates curiosity, novelty, and a sense of paradox, propelling a fascinating juxtaposition of thoughts, feelings, and events into creative relationship with each other. A client may experience a bewildering sense of fun and may laugh as he contemplates carrying out a particular paradoxical directive. Instead of the more usual "deadly serious" quality of traditional therapy sessions, brief strategic therapy often even elicits laughter from very depressed clients. Moreover, therapists who comfortably use this approach often report a refreshing sense of excitement, intrigue, and joy in going to work each day.

### *Maneuvering, not Manipulating*

With the power inherent in the Aikido approach, it sometimes appears that the Aikidoist is manipulating or "playing with" a challenger. The paradoxical stance, with the invitation to a confrontation, followed by the absence of resistance, the illusion of weakness in the one-down stance, the confusion and disorientation of the circular and often complex movements, and the surprisingly harmless resolution of aggression through indirect, subtle strategies, can seem manipulative and deceptive. We can perhaps best address such concerns by distinguishing between the two terms, "manipulating" and "maneuvering"; they have different connotations. The essential difference between them may be viewed as the initiator's *intent*. Although "manipulating"

has a pejorative, exploitative connotation, "maneuvering" has a more positive connotation. "Manipulating" is intended primarily to benefit the manipulator, at the expense of the person being manipulated. "Maneuvering," however, is intended primarily to benefit the person being maneuvered—for his own best interest. Using the gentle arts of distraction, illusion, and subtle persuasion, the Aikidoist, at his highest ethical levels, maneuvers and guides the challenger through a series of strategies to achieve the well-intentioned goal of harmless resolution of the challenge. Clearly these maneuvers are in the best interest of the challenger.

Similarly, the strategies of brief strategic therapy can be viewed as maneuvers intended to achieve what is believed to be the best interest of the client. When strategies are ethically conceived, carefully planned, and skillfully implemented, the therapist maneuvers the client to achieve the well-intentioned goal of constructive change and harmless resolution of problem behavior patterns. When the therapist is either careless or exploitative in his own interests, his strategies may be viewed as manipulative. It may be, for instance, that in the absence of any positive signs of change over a reasonable length of time, keeping a client in "therapy" is manipulative, because only the therapist may be receiving benefit—of a monetary nature. That can, perhaps, be equated to a martial artist who manipulates by using excessive and unnecessary roughness on a challenger when milder techniques would have been sufficient.

### *Stop Trying and Succeed*

A central problem of beginning Aikidoists is that they try too hard. Their moves tend to be linear, their thinking logical, their aim to be muscularly strong and forceful. For effective Aikido moves, the Aikido student must unlearn linear, logical, and forceful thinking. He must essentially stop trying so hard and relax. He must let go of his reflexive ways of operating and be will-

*there are other definitions*

ing to go with the flow, trusting a positive outcome. Accepting the natural way that people's bodies move and energies flow results in successful Aikido.

Similarly, the beginning brief strategic therapist must stop trying to change his clients by doing "more of the same." (11) He must be willing to flow with the symptoms, think illogically, and trust that a positive outcome will result if he accepts the natural way that people move psychologically. When he properly gets the feel of strategic thinking, he realizes that the strategies follow naturally from the direction and force of the client's energy.

It has been observed by both Aikido instructors and brief strategic therapy instructors that even effective practitioners periodically revert back to more traditional, logical, linear ways. This appears to be a function of the many years these practitioners have had of life training in Western thinking. Clearly, more Eastern ways of thinking are required for both of these disciplines. With experience, however, practitioners of both disciplines revert less often to traditional ways.

#### A "Brief" Example

In order to elucidate the usefulness of the conceptual parallels drawn in this paper between Aikido and brief strategic therapy, the following case example of brief strategic therapy is presented. The comments in parentheses refer to concepts elaborated upon in the paper.

Mrs. A. phones a therapist to request an appointment for her 10-year-old son, Billy, who has been overly aggressive, fighting with peers, destructive of property, and recently suspended from school for slashing another student's notebook with a knife. Moreover, he constantly beats up his 8-year-old brother, Jimmy and causes constant aggravation at home. Mother adds, "He's had a year of play therapy with each of two other doctors, but there was no change in him. I decided to try again, al-

though my husband isn't too hopeful" (the challenge). The therapist says, "It doesn't sound too promising, but I'm willing to try, so let's set an appointment for me to meet the whole family" (blending—initiation of systems view).

The family arrives. The therapist introduces himself to the family and suggests to the father that they proceed on a first-name basis (one-down stance). After some discussion, the following pattern emerges. Jimmy teases Billy; Billy hits Jimmy and breaks things; Jimmy runs to tell mother that Billy is breaking things again; Mother calls father, who severely punishes Billy, after which father catches mother's wrath for punishing Billy too severely, which adds additional strain to the marital relationship. Mother then comforts Billy, which piques the jealousy of Jimmy, who then teases Billy—and so forth (multiple challengers; interactionist view). The therapist (who centers himself in this dynamic sphere of interactions) begins to develop strategies to resolve these problems. First (by working on the sibling subsystem), he requests that Jimmy "help" his brother to practice self-control by using his best techniques to tease Billy three mornings the following week, without telling his parents which days they are (blending, extending—therapist get Jimmy and the rest of the family off balance momentarily by an unexpected move). The therapist then asks Billy if he has enough courage and guts to make a sacrifice in order to demonstrate that he is willing to try to make things better for himself and his family (pre-empting—therapist anticipates resistance and actively disarms it by inviting him in). Billy answers affirmatively, but the therapist then cautions him to listen first to the full request and give it more lengthy and serious thought (therapist retains control and keeps Billy off balance and receptive to the next maneuver). The therapist completes his request by asking Billy to make the sacrifice of allowing himself to get into big trouble the coming

weekend, which bly mean missing trip the next will no doubt take of paradoxical and simultaneous energy). The mother and father plan for the next the horse show, Billy dislikes it may help their sacrifices (therapist the maneuver, father. The therapist then to write detailed tive incident report father to review the home from work decide upon Billy sion (therapist act subsystem into a u tion, strengthening directors of the family desirable alternative-making behavior and because strates explicit knowledge he is no longer allowed in the family.

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weekend, which unfortunately will probably mean missing out on his favorite camping trip the next week, because his parents will no doubt take that privilege away (use of paradoxical maneuver of encouraging and simultaneously immobilizing his negative energy). The therapist then requests mother and father to set up an alternate plan for the next week to take the family to the horse show, which Jimmy enjoys and Billy dislikes intensely, in order that they may help their son, Billy, practice making sacrifices (therapist uses parents to extend the maneuver, further immobilizing Billy). The therapist then further instructs mother to write detailed notes about each destructive incident reported to her and to allow father to review them daily upon his return home from work. Together, they are to decide upon Billy's fate for each transgression (therapist actively maneuvers parental subsystem into a unified constructive direction, strengthening the parents' position as directors of the family system. Billy see no desirable alternative but to control his trouble-making behavior). Billy controls his behavior and because he, thereby, demonstrates explicit knowledge of his strategies, he is no longer allowed to function that way in the family.

Although several more strategic steps were necessary to resolve this situation sufficiently, a total of three sessions produced major and long-lasting shifts in the family system's interactional styles.

This example highlights not only the parallel pragmatic techniques of Aikido, but the attitudinal ones as well. As the therapist centered himself in the systemic interactions and respectfully and efficiently maneuvered each family member against the others, he flexibly followed the flow of the family members' strategies and resistances and guided them to a satisfactory and harmless resolution of their problem—assuredly “somewhat wiser.” Had he plugged away at “more of the same” (individual play therapy) and simply tried harder than

the previous therapist to change Billy alone, he no doubt would have failed or even caused injury to the family system. Instead, he stopped trying (in traditional ways), and he succeeded.

### Conclusions

This paper has presented a sample of the many similarities between the two conceptual systems, Aikido and brief strategic therapy. Conceptually grounding brief strategic therapy in a physical, but philosophically based, visual model elicits implications for future theory development, teaching, and training in this therapy approach. A further elaboration of these concepts is in progress and will be presented in a future publication.

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## How One Relation Problem

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