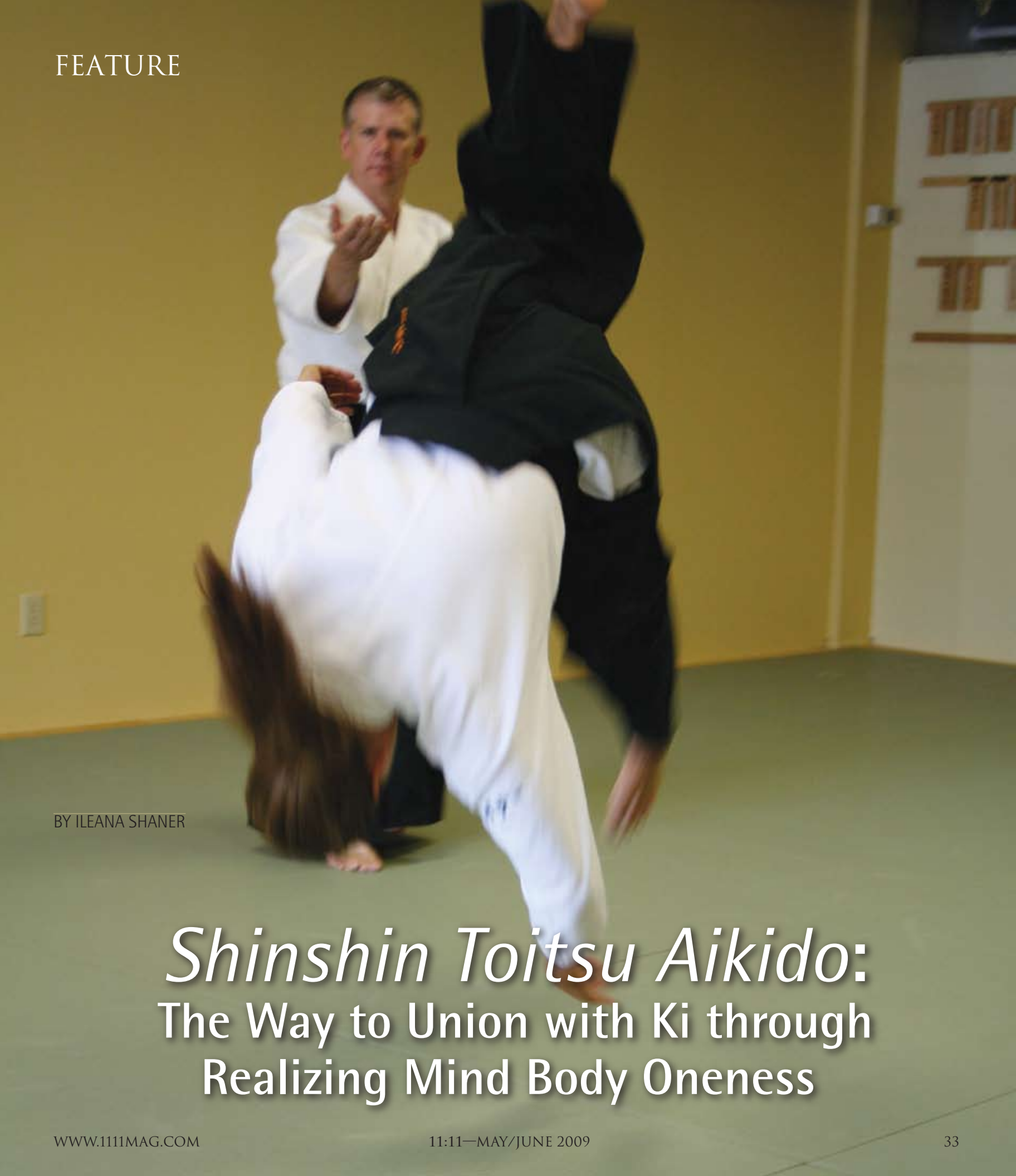


FEATURE

BY ILEANA SHANER



*Shinshin Toitsu Aikido:*  
The Way to Union with Ki through  
Realizing Mind Body Oneness

*"Let us have a Universal Mind that loves and protects all creation and helps all things grow and develop. To unify mind and body and become one with the Universe is the ultimate purpose of our study."*

Thus begins *Ki Sayings*, a collection of training fundamentals written by Koichi Tohei Sensei, founder of the Japanese martial art of *Shinshin Toitsu Aikido*. I came to this art 17 years ago as a pianist seeking to enhance my artistry and musicianship, to maximize my efficiency in the practice room, and to hone my focus and effectiveness as a performer. Today, I utilize the principles of *Aikido* in my daily life to perform to the best of my ability in everything that I do.

*Shinshin Toitsu Aikido* is literally translated as "the way to union with *Ki* through realizing our mind body oneness." *Ki*, the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese character *Chi*, is the life force that beats our heart, breathes our lungs, and facilitates the health producing miracle that is our body. This life force is one and the same as that shared by insects, creatures of the sky and sea, and all plants and animals. The *Ki* of the Universe gives rise to all life. Each species is a living breathing cell on the body of this planet.

Tohei Sensei teaches that "the absolute Universe is one. Then two opposing forces appeared and the relative world was born." The birth of this relative world brought with it the notion of separation; the idea that "I" am separate from "you" and that "we" are separate from the Universe. Global warming is a powerful example of the effects of this misconception. While we may exist in various individual bodies, we are anything but separate from one another or our environment. Similarly, our mind and body are not two separate entities. Rather they are inextricably connected.

*Shinshin Toitsu Aikido* (hereafter shortened to "*Ki Aikido*") is a path to realizing and directly experiencing oneness of mind and body. Tohei Sensei's lifelong commitment to personal development and teaching universal principles has resulted in a pedagogy that can be practiced by people of all ages, races, creeds and religions. Reflecting his study of not only *Aikido*, but also *Zen* and *Misogi* breathing, *Ki Aikido* offers five disciplines through which to experience the fullness of our being.

## The Five Disciplines of *Ki Aikido*

### 1. *Ki Breathing (Ki no kokyu ho)*

Inhaling through the nose and exhaling through the mouth, *Ki Breathing* brings our awareness into the present moment where we can directly experience our inseparable connection to the Universe. Breathing deeply through our whole body and always in a relaxed manner, *Ki Breathing* fully oxygenates our blood, improves circulation, restores energy and leaves us with a sense of calmness and peace. This training method cleanses the body of toxins and relieves stress, nervousness and anxiety.

"Breathe out so that your breath travels infinitely to the ends of the universe: breathe in so that your breath reaches your one point and continues infinitely there. The *Ki* breathing methods are an important way of unifying mind and body.

"At night when all is quiet and calm, do this alone, and you will feel that you are the universe and that the universe is you. It will lead you to the supreme ecstasy of being one with the universe. At this moment the life power that is rightfully yours is fully activated."

### 2. *Ki Meditation (Ki no seiza ho)*

Having acquired the necessary 21<sup>st</sup> century skill of multi-tasking, we may find it difficult to still our mind when the day draws to an end. Or, we may find that we are unable to completely focus on a single activity because our mind wants to race on to the next item on our "to do" list. *Ki Meditation* calms the mind by focusing on the one point in the lower abdomen. The one point is our physiological center of gravity and is located about three inches below the naval, just above our pubic bone. By condensing our one point by half until we cannot perceive anything smaller, and expanding it by half until we cannot perceive anything more vast, we smooth out the jaggedness of our thoughts, quiet our mind, and come to experience the peace and tranquility of being. This is our original and natural state. By practicing *Ki Meditation*, we experience the presence of the Universal *Ki* in ourselves, in our environment and in one another.



"We begin with the number One in counting all things. It is impossible that this One can ever be reduced to zero. Because just as something cannot be made from nothing, One cannot be made from zero.

"*Ki* is like the number One. *Ki* is formed from infinitely small particles, smaller than an atom. The universal *Ki* condensed becomes an individual, which in turn condensed becomes the one point in the lower abdomen, which in turn infinitely condensed never becomes zero, but becomes One with the Universe. Thus we understand the essence of *Ki*."

### 3. *Ki Therapy (Kiatsu Ryoho)*

Our body systems function without any conscious effort on our part. We do not have to direct our heart to beat, our lungs to breathe or our brain to send signals through our nervous system. However, due to physical and emotional stress, injury, and dis-ease, we may suffer from

physical pain. *Kiatsu Ryoho* is a method for helping to restore our *Ki* and facilitate the body's innate ability to heal itself. By sending *Ki* through the finger tips along lines or meridians of the body, the *Kiatsu* practitioner acts as a conduit for the *Ki* of the Universe, directing the patient's mind and *Ki* to the area in need of healing. Based on the principle that mind leads body, together the practitioner and patient call forth the *Ki* of the universe to accelerate the body's natural healing process.

"We have learned coordination of mind and body and the *Ki* breathing methods. Therefore we can bring the *Ki* of the universe into our bodies at any time.

"When a water pump is dried out, no water can flow from the well up through the pump. To start this flow again we must put some water back into the pump. In the same way, *Ki* does not flow strongly in a person suffering from illness or misfortune. Let us practice *Kiatsu ryoho* to put *Ki* back into these people, stimulate their own flow of *Ki*, and give them a fresh start to happiness."

#### 4. Purification "Violent" Meditation (*Sokushin no gyo [Misogi]*)

Bell *Misogi*, an active or "violent" meditation that involves chanting and swinging a bell, was developed to cultivate mind body oneness while performing vigorous activity. Traditionally, it was practiced to test endurance and to exceed one's own notion of his or her physical and mental limitations. With each exhalation of the chant (representing the mind) paired in unison with each swing of the bell (representing the body), we experience the power and vitality of mind body oneness. This practice serves as an intentional cleansing and purification of our whole self, strengthens our will, and reminds us to give 100% in everything that we do.

"Just as tops spinning violently and rapidly become steady, the most rapid movement results in calm.

"Like the eye of the typhoon which is always peaceful, inner calm results in great strength of action. Calm and action are exactly one.

"Only when we keep one point and unify our mind and body, can we find spare time even when busy. Keep a calm mind and you will be able to perform to the best of your ability even in an emergency or when facing important tasks."

#### 5. Aikido Arts (*Aikido Waza*)

Based on the principle of non-dissension, *Aikido* techniques are performed with respect for the mind and intention of one's training partner and above all avoid collision and conflict. By leading your partner's mind in accordance with the principles of the Universe, their body will naturally follow.

While *Aikido* techniques serve to effectively defend oneself from an attacker, self defense is not the immediate purpose of training. Developing

a universal spirit that loves and protects all creation and helps all things grow and develop, and realizing mind body oneness are the ultimate reasons for this training. The practice of *Aikido* cultivates our awareness of one another and our conscious connection to all life. Furthermore, it serves as a clear mirror for how we deal with conflict in day to day interactions. *Aikido* arts teach us to calmly recognize conflict and to respond from a place of balance, stability and freedom. When we meet conflict with a peaceful heart and spirit, coupled with deep respect for all living beings, we can perform with confidence and lead others without force.

"The absolute universe is One. Then two opposing forces appeared, and the relative world was born.

"In the Orient this dualism is called yin and yang, in the West plus and minus. A bright and happy life is called plus life, and a dark, gloomy one is called minus. "Let us eliminate every minus thought and strive for plus life henceforth."

*Ki Aikido* is a profound art that is accessible to anyone interested in enhancing their quality of life. While the most popular and well known method of practice is through the martial technique, one can realize coordination of mind and body through the various disciplines that encompass our training. Improved physical coordination and fluidity of movement, stress reduction and focused concentration, and improved circulation, over all health and peace of mind are a few of the many benefits received by giving oneself to this art. By experiencing oneness of mind and body, we can sense for ourselves the *Ki* of the Universe that embraces us. With a deeper connection to ourselves and the Universe, we naturally extend this awareness in our daily life, promoting optimal health, wholeness and respect for all living things.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ileana Shaner is a pianist, a jewelry designer and a martial artist. She currently holds the rank of 4<sup>th</sup> degree black belt in *Shinshin Toitsu Aikido*, the rank of *chuden* in the art of *Shinshin Toitsudo*, and is an Associate Lecturer for the International *Ki* Society. In 1996, she and her *taigi* partner, Eric Harrell, won the first International World Cup *Taigi* competition in Tochigi, Japan.

Ileana is passionate about experiencing oneness of mind, body, and spirit. It is through *Aikido* movement, *Ki* development exercises, breathing and meditation, *Kiatsu* therapy, music, and creative artistry that Ileana practices to realize her potential and help others discover their own.



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