

CHAPTER 5

The Leader as Martial Artist

When I learn to hammer in a nail, I have learned a skill, but the way in which I use the hammer is a *metaskill*. The same is true in developing skills in working with individuals and groups. We need to learn skills and techniques, but these cannot be applied without the proper metaskills of deep democracy.

In working with groups or organizations in serious trouble, either with themselves or with other groups, the decisive factor for the facilitator is not the skills or methods she uses but the attitudes she has toward the group. These attitudes and beliefs are what I call *metaskills*. They generate tools for dealing with any situation.

Think of compassion as a metaskill. A skill applied without compassion for people will have less effect than the same skill applied with compassion. This obvious simple truth is not so simple in practice. We all know how to teach skills, but metaskills are more complex. Metaskills are essential in doing worldwork, but how does one teach and learn attitudes, beliefs, and feelings about people? Discovering and developing metaskills require a mixture of talent, inner development, and outer role models as well as other factors that I have not yet identified.

This chapter attempts to outline some deep democracy metaskills for doing worldwork. I am still somewhat uncertain how to teach or awaken these metaskills in others. I can only admit my own beliefs, hopes, and motivations about people and try to discover what my own attitudes and metaskills are. I use the analogy of martial arts to describe some of the attitudes the facilitator needs for doing worldwork.

The Facilitator as a Role

Working with any group requires, first and foremost, awareness of one's role as a group facilitator. The facilitator role differs from other roles in a group in its interest in the well-being of the entire group and its relationship to the world. The facilitator does not belong to any given party or part, unless, of course, interest in the whole can be considered a part as well.

From the viewpoint of both group and personal psychology, leadership and facilitation together are only one of our aspects, one part of our overall process. In other words, leadership is not connected to any one individual but can be experienced in each one of us at some time. No one is only a leader! Knowing this is one of the crucial metaskills of leadership, for it allows us to be fluid and multifaceted as leaders and as followers.

Learning from the Group Energy

The majority of people deal with tensions in a group by one of three means:

- repressing the tensions and trying to be nice to one another
- analyzing the tensions and trying to change ourselves or others
- getting into the tensions and hurting one another

The concepts and skills of martial arts offer another process-oriented way of dealing with conflict. The martial arts describe some of the attitudes the facilitator needs toward the group with which she is working. Aikido, especially, can be used as a new way to look at tension and conflict, perhaps even giving us a way to get over our fear and become involved in tensions.

Japanese Aikido is based on the principle of field energy, or Ki. In *The Spirit of Aikido*, Kisshomaru Ueshiba, quoting ancient Japanese texts on martial arts, relates Ki energy to metaphysical principles in China. According to Ueshiba, Ki

was the source of creativity expressed in the form of the yin and yang (Lao tzu), the vital fullness of life (Huaninan-tzu), the courage arising from moral rectitude (Mencius), the divine force that penetrates all things (Kuan-tzu) (p. 21).

It was connected to “empty space,” the “void” or “nothingness” (Lao-tzu), and the “formative energy emerging from chaos” (Chuang-tzu).

In our terms, Ki would be the field’s force or intensity. Like the field of a group, Ki is empty or contentless. It is an energy that creates changing patterns out of chaos. Since Ki is the “courage arising from moral rectitude,” it is also the metaskill or attitude necessary for dealing with itself. The field teaches the facilitator how to work with the field itself by remaining void, or open to the movement trying to happen.

If we want to ski, the mountain itself becomes our teacher and method. If we want to surf, then the sea is the teacher. If we want to learn how to facilitate difficult groups, nature teaches us the way through its changing seasons of anger and love, egotism and compassion. The best interventions for a group in conflict are not those that the facilitator brings in from the outside but those that arise naturally out of the group’s changing moods, tensions, emotions, roles, and timespirits. The narrow path that the facilitator must follow is a path the group itself creates and can accept.

According to Ueshiba, Ki is a “divine energy.” In my experience this means that the group’s energy cannot be completely controlled or predicted, that it is a mysterious spirit. I have tried many times to govern the way in which processes proceed. Sometimes I have been successful, sometimes not. When I could not control a group process or intense conflict, I inevitably discovered that the reason was that I had turned against it and some of the people involved. I thought I knew better. Since I was not following the Ki, or spirit, I learned the hard way that my job was to serve and not to act like the spirit.

Self-Balance

Densho Chushaku, an important classical jujitsu text of the kito school, recommends that the warrior balance the overall situation by following the different forms of Ki and using the energy of his opponent.

Kito means rising and falling. Rising is the form of yang, and falling is the form of yin. One wins by recourse to yang and wins by recourse to yin. When the partner shows yin, win by yang. When the partner is yang, win by yin.... To discard one’s strength and win by using the partner’s strength works because of *ki*.¹

The drive to win is more disturbing than useful in worldwork. Most of the martial arts do not speak about fighting and winning but are concerned with the overall development of the participants. Occasionally, as in the above quote, the message is concerned with overcoming the opponent and winning a battle. The recommendation is to notice how the field balances itself.

The facilitator's job is to follow the Ki: the field's changing excitement, interest, and energy. The facilitator "wins" in groupwork by going with what is present. She follows excitement when it arises by giving way to it and follows depression when energy falls by revealing its essence.

I remember the tension once arising in a process work group when outsiders in the group felt shut out by more advanced trainers identified as insiders. Suddenly, during the polarity, everyone fell silent. I wondered if the outsiders had said all they felt. An outsider then said the insiders appeared inflated, as if they knew everything and were better than the others. I listened carefully to the attack, and as an insider (as well as facilitator), I realized the truth of the attack. After all, I myself, I told everyone, am sometimes inflated, blowing up like a balloon when I discover something I imagine others have not known, and then I go down like lead when attacked for being inflated! Everyone laughed as Yang was hit by Yin!

The facilitator uses awareness by noticing her own feelings, switching roles and identities, and moving back and forth so that she is neither attacker nor defender, but both in and out of the tension at the same time.

The ideal facilitator does not have a program but follows the Ki, or energy of the group. She helps complete the group's experience by using its energy and listening closely to all opponents. She may even assist her own enemy in completing his opinions and viewpoint. This type of facilitation is good ecology; it does not require additional energy to make change. The field will readjust itself and reach resolution if we use the processes that are already there.

Following Hidden Ki and Secondary Processes

Following the field is contingent upon recognizing the field. The parts in the field are often hidden or disguised. In *Heiho Kaden Sho* on the art of swordsmanship, it is said that "the Ki that is hidden and not revealed presents the opportunity for victory."²

Imagine a person who identifies with being angry but is really needy and sad, then the *hidden Ki* is sadness. Others feel this sadness, though the person may not notice it. Here, resolution of any communication problem depends upon following the sadness, the “double signal.” A double signal is a signal containing two conflicting messages. For instance, in a group process, someone might be asking for help and unconsciously be yelling at the group for not working hard enough. The double signal, the hidden Ki, is yelling and needing help. The hidden Ki of a double signal is always that which the person does not identify as the main part of the message.

Find the hidden Ki as a facilitator by noticing when people are not just angry but also needy. Feed the need, not just the anger. When someone is criticizing you, notice if he is also shy about it, and address the shyness. Notice when your opponent is loud and in need of more attention, and listen appreciatively. Notice when your opponent is belligerent and also correct, and compliment the correctness. Notice when your opponent is not just powerful but also secretly hoping to be restrained. Help him by also complaining about your inability to restrain him. This is winning through the *hidden Ki*.

Love of Nature

In *Tengu Geijutsu Ron*, on swordsmanship it is said,

In all matters related to the arts, including martial arts, superiority is determined through training and practice, but true excellence is dependent on ki. The grandeur of heaven and earth, the brilliance of sun and moon, the changing of the seasons, heat and cold, birth and death, are all due to the alternation of yin and yang. Their subtle working cannot be described by words, but within it all things fulfill life by means of ki. Ki is the origin of life, and when ki takes leave of form, death ensues.³

This poetic description of the Ki is more than a recommendation about following processes. This text implies that though skill or superiority depends upon training and practice in interventions, actual success depends upon our metaskills, upon perception, love, belief, and ability to follow the changes of the field.

This statement describes the heart of deep democracy in individual work and groupwork. Facilitation depends upon our respect and love for nature, the “grandeur of heaven and earth,” our awe of the

land and the sea, mountains and snow, the changing seasons and the changes in human beings. All of us are at heart nature lovers, but we often forget our love for nature when we deal with one another, thus dividing nature from humanity, the space spirits from group process.

We all too often try to solve problems without believing in the wisdom of natural flow. We wear ourselves out using our own energies rather than using only interventions that are recommended by the interactions between the timespirits themselves! Nature makes choice; we only need to follow.

Detachment

A central characteristic of leadership is the ability to maintain awareness in the midst of group chaos and confusion. Perhaps the greatest difficulty in developing this leadership characteristic is that it can only be learned "on the job," in the midst of group processes. The intense heat created by positive and negative projections, strife and celebration, anger and love disturbs the development of the leader but also helps her develop her abilities to completion.

Facilitating and leading relatively harmonious and peaceful group processes can be done by almost anyone, but managing tense public situations is a different story. It requires study, practice, and, above all, innerwork.

A classical story from Master Ueshiba, the founder of Aikido, describes his detachment. Master Ueshiba relates that while traveling he found himself in the midst of a battle.

I prepared myself for death and then, saw clearly that the movements in martial arts come alive when the center of ki is concentrated in one's mind and body and that the calmer I became, the clearer my mind became. I could intuitively see the thoughts, including the violent intentions, of the other. The calm mind is like the quiet center of a spinning top: because of the calm center, the top is able to spin smoothly and rapidly. It almost seems to be standing still.⁴

The master was able to detach and avoid getting attacked. But how? I suspect that his "preparation for death" was the crucial element in the story. Fear of death can be a godsend. We can use our fear of attack as an indication that part of us should be annihilated.

Becoming aware of all of our parts, we can die, so to speak, before we are killed, and protect ourselves from attack. If we lose our self-importance, we become uninteresting as targets. We become invisible. If we remove ourselves, then the attacker has no one to hit, and the Ki or field can move us about as if we were enacting the dance of nature.

But avoiding attack is only the beginning. A next level would be to consciously admit and then step away from our one-sided position, become neutral, and thank our attackers for helping us loosen up our old identity. Then we could even take their side and help them complete their process. I will talk more about conflict in the next chapter.

But the question of how the facilitator is to arrive at her attitude of detachment still remains. Detachment is not always possible. The following are some hints for developing this important metaskill.

Burn Your Wood

You can be cool in conflict if you are not interested in the battle, but this can only be achieved if you have already fed the fires of your own rage. If you have already raged long enough about the issue being discussed in the group, then there is no longer any wood. The fire is done.

Being detached, however, does not mean that you are uninterested in the conflict; just the opposite—you have more feeling for everyone in the fight, including your opponents. Being detached only means that the issues are no longer burning ones for you.

Accumulate Experience in Conflict

Detachment sometimes comes after you have so much experience in conflict that you become detached from the forcefulness and futility of the attempt to win. You can appreciate and support others in their attempt to win without becoming infected by their way.

Accept Conflict as Your Fate

Sometimes you may realize that you are in a tense situation because you need to be. You see conflict as your fate. You cannot avoid it, so you make the most of it by learning and using it to grow.

An Example

The following example of group process and conflict illustrates some of the above-listed metaskills for facilitating conflict.

My wife, Amy, and I were conducting a workshop for approximately 150 participants at a residential center. We were visited one evening by part of the center's staff. The staff complained and criticized us for not following some of the rules of the center and for being sloppy. They complained that our group left glasses and dishes in the seminar room instead of carrying them into the kitchen. They were overworked and underpaid and were angry that the group did not pick up after itself.

Their point was well made; indeed, we were just plain sloppy. However, even when we admitted it, apologized, and promised to reform, the leader of the staff continued to attack us. We defended ourselves and complained that they were becoming unfair in their attack. A member of their staff admitted that they were under tremendous strain and were in conflict with one another. He suggested that their internal conflicts were the real problem. We offered to help them "clean up" their difficulties if they needed it. They agreed, even though their leader was still dissatisfied with us.

They thrashed out their internal conflicts, and it seemed as if progress had been made. Toward the end of the evening, one member of our group came forward and said she was still hurt from the staff leader's earlier attack. She asked the leader of the staff for an apology. The leader said she did not want to apologize and was not able to. The participant again asked the leader for an apology, and the leader grew even more adamant. As the situation escalated, I jumped in and got down on my knees in front of the leader and begged for her forgiveness. When my plea did not soften her, I rapidly changed and became furious!

I stood up and bombarded the woman with a barrage of criticisms. I stopped as suddenly as I had begun and took her side against me, feeling truly sorry that she had to take all of my criticism. She just seemed to freeze even more. I went over and physically took her side and tried to show her how to defend herself against me. Since she could neither attack me nor protect herself, I suspected that she was only standing in the same place but—as I mentioned earlier—internally had left her position. Hidden Ki!

I gently touched her arm, saying that she must have cursed the day she began to attack us and must never have suspected that such a scene

would have happened. She collapsed on the spot, sank to her knees, and hit the floor. In a moment she came back to her knees, crawled across the floor, and, in a moving gesture, hugged the woman who had asked for an apology, and the evening was done.

The next morning, most of the members of my group were satisfied with the previous night's process, but a few were unhappy with what I had done. One man said he was angry at me for having been so tough with the staff leader.

The whole group got involved, and the conflict began again. Others in the group reminded the man that I had also been humble. I reacted by defending myself. I said that the woman's attack needed a well-intended response. I said that things had ended well, that I had also taken her side, and that I genuinely felt bad for her and wanted to help her out of her impossible position.

Again hidden Ki! Hidden behind the critical comments was also a request for me to listen closely, to encourage the speaker to stand up and speak his mind and to appreciate his leadership potential. Though I had been able to follow the Tao the evening before, I almost missed the Tao of the following morning because I did not realize that my new attacker himself needed recognition as a leader, and because I was simply insecure.

But there was another hidden Ki! I, too, was insufficiently happy with my work the night before. In retrospect I see that though I was happy with the resolution, I had repressed my unhappiness about having to fight in the first place! I felt bad that I had been so forceful with the staff leader.

I was obviously attached to doing well, because I was relieved when, two days later, the staff leader who had attacked us reappeared for a few minutes to humbly say that her staff had changed, grown stronger, and also attacked her. Apparently they had been afraid to do so before. She said that this had been one of the most "exquisite experiences" of her life. Many weeks later I heard that this woman was still appreciative of her experiences that evening. I was happy for us both: that she and I had learned so much about ourselves.

Assisting the Attacker

In some martial arts traditions, the teacher assists the student in overcoming him and in so doing helps to educate the attacker. The political implications of this are that a leader who is attacked is in a

position not only to accept the attack and change but also to help the attacker create change in a useful way. In fact, the facilitator herself realizes that part of her job may be not only to resolve issues but also to assist others in processing the tensions of history in a more human fashion than in the past. Therefore, we should tell our attackers exactly what we think about their style. Were they too brutal, too shy, or too vague? Are their points well made? If not, then we should try to help them if we can.

The time of attack is an excellent moment to become a teacher of awareness. Being overcome may be profitable for both the attacker and the deposed leader if cooperative growth is your goal.

An Example from South Africa

I remember clearly my first trip to South Africa. I had a lot of optimism and excitement about testing my process work skills in South Africa. I did not realize that my optimism about group processing could be a response to their pessimism. I also did not know that their need to lead themselves out of their own situation was more important than my teaching them something about conflict resolution.

Live and learn! I learned the hard way that the members of any group are the only ones who can find resolution to their tension. The Africans must obviously be the ones to resolve their own tensions.

I said in the first meeting that the tools I was going to present were capable of solving the most difficult conflicts in several hours. I was unconscious about how my optimism and excitement polarized the group. A black social worker listened to my one-sided remarks and became my opponent who was going to prove me wrong.

She made a few negative comments in the beginning, but I overlooked them and launched into my work with the group. After a few hours, her pessimism naturally returned. She presented me with what she called an unsolvable conflict between two black groups in a Capetown township. I tried my best to solve the conflict. We went back and forth, switched roles, and did everything to counter her pessimism, until I realized that I was being attacked for being hopeful.

My antagonist stood up and admitted that she just wanted to prove that not all conflicts could be solved and that I could not be right. She awakened me in the last moment! She was not just pessimistic. I finally gave up my optimistic ways and agreed with her. I said not only that

was I most likely incorrect but also that she was meant to be the leader and facilitator who could show the rest of us how to deal with the township tensions! Our conflict resolved on the spot.

That resolved the group for the moment. As everyone was silent, I realized many truths at once. People in conflict do not want to need help from outside to show them the way. Outside help has no grass-roots effects. People living in conflict areas need love and encouragement first and education second. If a group in conflict does not get encouragement from the outside, the growing leaders within the group can only assert their potential power by inhibiting outside resolutions! The moral of this story is metaskills first, skills and information second.

Facilitation Exercises for Conflict and Attack

The following exercises are for those involved in public conflicts. They are meant as training exercises, not as a program to be followed during conflict. Hopefully these exercises will enable you to develop a generous view of others, allow you to tolerate and process violence, and increase your respect for the field in which we live.

1. Imagine the worst attack you have suffered as a leader in public.
2. Act out being the person who attacked you. Show someone else how to play this person and experiment with the following defense methods as they become real for you.
 - a. *Admit that your attacker is correct* and that you need to change. Then do so.
 - b. *Get behind the attacker's affect*. Find out what his or her hidden Ki or motivation is. Does he want to attack you? Does he want to make you realize that he is also an intelligent leader? Is he attacking you because he has been attacked and is in pain?
 - c. *Take your own side*. Defend yourself and attack the attacker back. Or admit how hurt you are and show your hurt to the attacker.
 - d. *Step out from your role* and help your opponent criticize you. If this is taking place in a group, ask others in the group to take your conflict as two timespirits meeting one another, as roles that everyone must fill.
 - e. *Admit that your attacker is a teacher* and ask him to model the changes he expects you to be able to make in yourself.

- f. *Complete the group process by noticing if everyone is involved in the conflict you are having. Get the group to work on the issue themselves to discover how the conflict is valid or invalid for them personally.*
- g. *Work on yourself publicly.* Report to the attacker and to the group what is happening to you internally as you are being attacked. Attend to and complete all the experiences you are having inside until you find an inner resolution.
- h. *Critique your attacker's methods of attacking.* Are they forceful enough? Are there double signals that make her incongruent? Is she sticking to her side even when she feels your own? Can she switch roles? Is she sufficiently compassionate? Use your awareness to take her side and help her grow! Do not just get bogged down in your abilities or inabilities.
- i. *Ask for help.* Finally, ask her to help you grow. Were you honest about your feelings? Were you real and congruent? Were you also able to detach and flow with what was happening? And most importantly, does your attacker now trust you?

NOTES

1. Kisshomaru Ueshiba, *The Spirit of Aikido*, p. 23.
2. *Heiho Kaden Sho*, p. 23.
3. *Heiho Kaden Sho*, p. 23.
4. *Heiho Kaden Sho*, p. 23.