

Statement of Philosophy

**Beth Cody
December 1, 2001**

Flow

One idea I keep returning in Hapkido is that of making techniques flow. In my practice of Hapkido, I have noticed that the times I have done techniques the best have been when my movements seem to flow effortlessly from beginning to end. I found myself wondering why this happened sometimes and not others, and how I might replicate it more often.

I believe that flow comes from seeing the technique as one seamless movement, a movement that begins from the moment your attacker moves toward you.

When we teach Hapkido to beginning students, we break each technique down into several steps for better understanding. Most techniques are complex, involving compound movements in more than one direction, and feet and hands performing separate movements. Teaching beginners to concentrate on each distinct step forces them to include each step in the movement, and it slows the technique down, which makes it safer for the partner's fall. If a beginner tries to perform a technique quickly, before they understand where to put their hands, feet and body, as well as their energy, a partner can be hurt trying to fall out of the botched technique. When the throw is done slowly, if something does go horribly wrong, a faller can stop the throw from happening. I am a great believer in doing techniques slowly for a long time, until the movements feel completely natural.

However, as a student gains technical proficiency, they should be encouraged to think of the technique in one movement, rather than in several steps. This will result in increased understanding of the "flow" of the technique.

To achieve flow, it is important to think about what direction the attacker will be falling when doing a technique. From the very beginning of the attack, you should concentrate on trying to lead the attacker toward the direction you intend them to fall. It will require far less strength and speed to throw the person because they are already leaning in that direction and their energy is moving that direction. This important concept is also commonly known as unbalancing your attacker.

This is related to the principle of non-resistance. Students often first become aware of this principle when learning pushing techniques. The idea, when facing a pushing attacker, is to side-step the forward energy of the push and redirect it toward the direction you wish. Later, a student may realize that even a wrist grab has a small amount of energy, which can be used just like the more dynamic energy of a push. The hard part is figuring out which direction the energy is going, blending with the energy and directing it to where you want - and doing it all in an instant.

Using unbalancing, directing or flow is the best way to throw people for a number of reasons:

1. It makes the technique much, much easier. A small person often has no hope of throwing a large person, unless the attacker's weight is already shifting toward the direction of the throw, and the thrower's energy is fully committed in one seamless movement.
2. It is safer for both the thrower and the attacker if the direction of the fall is clear to both from the beginning of the encounter. By guiding the attacker toward the fall, surprises are avoided. The attacker knows which way to fall and the thrower knows where not to be

standing when the attacker falls. Also, relying on strong, sudden snaps of the arm and shoulder for throwing power, instead of balance and flow, not only can be unpleasantly jerky to fall for, but can also put your partner in danger of shoulder dislocation or other injury.

3. It allows for stealth. In a real-time situation, an aggressor is going to be nervous when attacking a victim. The act of unbalancing an opponent is so subtle as not to arouse suspicion. The aggressor is nearly on the ground before he realizes you are up to something, far too late for him to do anything about it. Sudden, snappy moves likely would alert the attacker that you are trying to resist him.
4. It allows for the inevitability of decline. All of us grow slower and weaker with the passing years. Even big, strong guys, who might be saying: “Yeah, so I snap an attacker’s arm too hard. Boo hoo for him.” – When you are 70 years old, do you really think that you will be able to surprise a 20-year-old attacker with your speed or out-muscle him with your strength? I for one would like a method of self-defense which does not rely on speed or strength. The founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba, remarked that he truly understood Aikido only after he lost his physical strength in old age.

The idea of direction or flow applies to other areas of life. The most common way we all employ flow is in our everyday language. The word “fluent” comes from the Latin word for flow. A fluent speaker of English (or of any language, for that matter) speaks in phrases, not in perfectly spaced, equally emphasized words, which would sound like a robot. “We.. do.. not.. talk.. like.. this.” “We talk like *this*.” Our words have direction, and lead up to the most important word in the phrase, the one we wish to emphasize. Music is also made up of phrases, and playing phrases rather than notes gives music its meaning and emotion.

Those who understand how to practice forms or katas understand that katas too must flow like speech or music. A kata is made of a number of phrases, each of which is a series of movements such as punches, kicks or steps leading in intensity toward a more important movement, often emphasized with a *kiap*.

I am only just beginning to understand the principles of balance and directing energy, and I still only occasionally experience the incredible results of employing the principles correctly. As I continue to practice Hapkido, I will continue to work at making my techniques flow.