

The Purpose of Uchikomi (Target Striking)

by Paul 'Batman' O'Brien

Uchikomi is a discipline that permeates nearly all Japanese martial arts. The term uchikomi means to strike the target, however, as with all things Japanese there is a deeper meaning. **Uchi** typically means 'hit' or 'strike'. **Komi** meanwhile means 'inclusive', 'in bulk' or 'crowded'. That's an odd word to use in this context. One could translate uchikomi then as strike the bulk of a thing, or strike a mass. However when I think of this I look at it from my swordsmanship, karate and combat training. I think it is putting everything, all that I am (being inclusive), putting my full bulk into a precise target. Hitting with nothing less than the totality of my being.

And we see the development and practice of this type of strength training in different ways. For instance within **Shotokan Karate** we have the striking of the **makiwara**, a board sunk into the ground and wrapped in rice straw. Contacting the makiwara with the full force and power of the body concentrated in to a square inch on knuckle or bone. The impact is devastating. But conditioning in this way, strengthen the tendons and ligaments and the muscles - the momentary isometric load throughout the body is incredible. Building not just our muscle and connective tissue but solidifying and densifying the bones themselves.

The same is done in sumo wrestling. In many traditional sumo stables there is a large wooden pillar, dented and hard from the repeated full body powered open hand strikes of the **sumotori**. This is called **teppo**. In Judo the full body commitment is also seen in the technique of uchikomi where the whole body is hurled into an opponent to set up a throw. Within Kendo it is used to practice specific targeted strikes.

Within the study of the sword in combat the daily uchikomi training teaches not just devastating precision in one's strikes but the use of the full body in the delivery of these cuts. Traditionally within the koryu (old methods) bujutsu of feudal Japan uchikomi was not just a full force activity but a full soul activity. It requires a remarkable summoning of spirit to maintain full force, accurate cutting. The **Jigen ryu**, famous in **Satsuma** province in Japan has a particularly strong version of this that can still be seen today. The would take bundles of hard sticks and strike them emitting a continuous and piercing **kiai** (spirit shout) as struck again and again, unrelenting in their ferocity. A similar exercise was used in Aikido and you can even see footage of **Morehei Ueshiba** performing vigorous uchikomi as a result of his training in

Jigen Ryu - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B5dAUfTQjSw>

Moriehei Ueshiba Aikido Tanren - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K_TmFosN6bE

The key to uchikomi is two-fold - once again strongly suggesting the underlying concept of Yin and Yang. The Yang, the active fierce strong element of this is evident - the full force strike and

movement of the body. But the Yin - is the true strength of these exercises; the momentary Isometric pause in which the body absorbs the equal force of the strike itself. Every reaction as an equal and opposite reaction. When you strike the makiwara with the full force of the body is you cannot apply an equal strength of stillness, Isometric strength you will simply be bounced off the target and struck with the same force that you are struck with.

The same is true in swordsmanship - a powerful swing was necessary on the battle field, however, if you could not contain the force that returns to the body with such a blow, then it would be for nothing. And such strength was needed - as the sword would often blunt and fail on the field of battle, with the greatest of swordsmen, **Miyamoto Musashi**, giving up the sword itself to use a wooden sword, a bokken instead. The bokken does not blunt, and wielded correctly is devastating in its lethality and should it break it can quickly and inexpensive replaced unlike a sword. While we use the bokken in uchikomi it is important to respect the power and lethality our cuts and hits can deliver.

Uchikomi represents the perfect balance of both Yin and Yang in our training. From devastating physical movement, delivered with the full strength of the body, to the Yin Isometrics, unflinching absorbing that through the body and using that to deliver another devastating strike. Beyond that there is the Yang of the body and it's physical work and the Yin of the mind provides the focus and determination to full engage the body in each strike. It is truly one of the most powerful and important methods of power forging. Physical, mental and emotional. It is excellent tanren.

The Primary Benefits of Uchikomi Tanren are as follows:

- Correct Tenouchi
- Whole Body Strength
- Understanding of dispersal of force
- Generation of incredible power
- Focus and precision
- Resistance to injury
- Cultivation of internal strength (steel jacket / Iron shirt training)

How to Build a Taren-Uchi

The construction of a Tanren-uchi is a simple and satisfying undertaking. It is inexpensive and takes little time, and will provide you with a training tool that will last you your entire life. The instructions here are for a portable tanren-uchi I use in my home. With a dojo or permanent residence (indoor or outdoor) a more elaborate and fixed version can be easily made by modifying this template.

What you will need:

- An old car tyre (I didn't have one handy so I went to local garage and asked if they had some spares that were to be scrapped - no cost and a selection of tyres)
- 2 x stout chunks of timber that come up to around waist height when stood on end (I had these left over from some raised beds I'd built). They need to be sturdy as they will be taking the weight of the tyre & the force of your strikes.
- 6 x planks of wood. These don't have to be particularly strong as they act as braces & aren't taking any direct force (I got mine cut but you can use some old palettes).
- 2 x lumps of timber that will act as feet (again I used parts of the pallet for this).
- 4 x bolts & washers (you will also need a drill bit big enough to make holes in the tyre to accommodate these). I used M8x80.
- 20 x wood screws (weather proof if it's going to be left outside) I used 5.0 x 60mm.
- Wood treatment (only necessary if it's going to be left outside)

Step 1 - Wood Cut to Size and Nails

I went to local wood suppliers with my dimensions. They cut a nice piece of timber that had been pressure treated and sealed to size. It cost €10, cutting included and I needed up with enough wood for three frames.



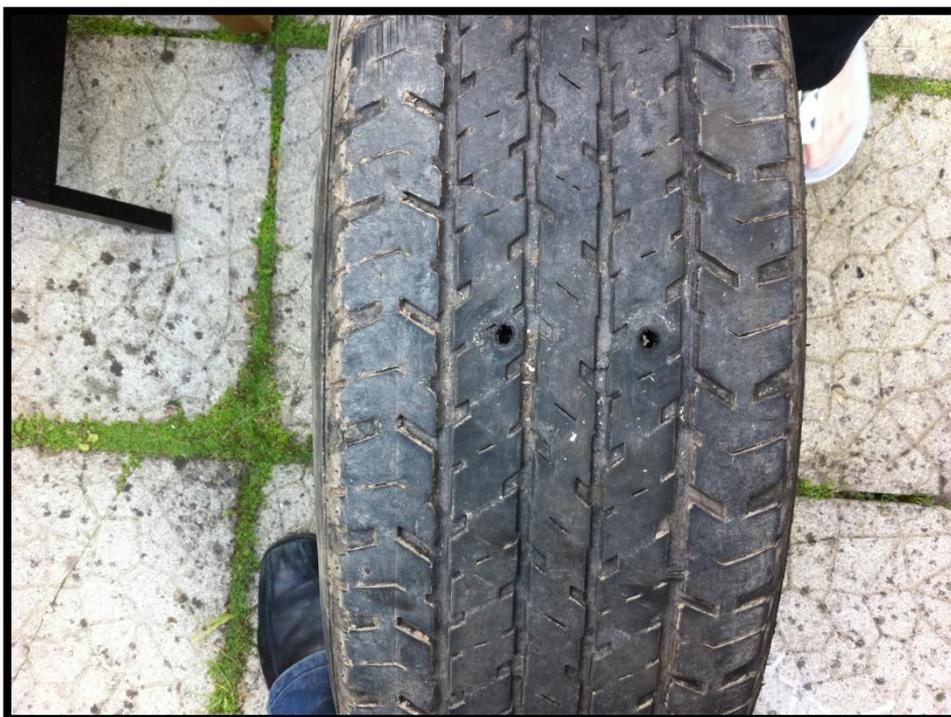
Step 2 - Measure the Wood

I used 2 measured the tire so that half of it would be above the top of wooden side column and then fixed the point this would be with two holes, two inches apart.



Step 3 Drill your holes in the tyre

2 inches apart and level obviously to match the positions on your wooden side posts.



Step 3 - Test fit and Bolt the tyre to the wood using the M8x80's



Step 4 - test fit and measure your supporting panels



Step 5 - Screw them in using your wood screws.

4 screws per panel. Three panels, placed as shown



Step 6 - Fix on extra support stands (if necessary)

Step 7 - Paint on wood stain (if necessary)

My wood was already treated but....I wanted a darker colour so went with the old Ronseal quick drying wood stain. It does exactly what it says on the tin. ;-)

Step 8 - Use your tanren uchi.

In this guide and video series there are a series of exercises you can use your tanren-uchi for, including tsuki, kirioroshi, and kesagiri cuts.