

About Aikido

Aikido is a modern, non-violent, non-aggressive Japanese martial art which was developed early in this century by Morihei Ueshiba (1883-1969). In Japanese, aikido means "the Way of harmony with the force and principle of nature." Aikido is derived from Japan's traditional budo (the Way of martial arts), yet goes beyond the realm of budo; it is a path where the keen edge of martial art is used as a "Way" to spiritual growth.

The Birth of Aikido

History, in many respects, has unfolded on the battlefield. Nations and races have risen and fallen to ruin in the midst of struggles - battles waged in the name of justice and peace, but which instead gave birth to the notion of military might and conquest.

In Japan, the Samurai or warrior class were the curators of the art of battle, known as bujyutsu. The Samurai's influence rose with the Minamoto family's establishment of military rule over Japan in 1205 and continued until the Meiji restoration of 1868. The restoration ended 200 years of self-imposed isolation from the outside world; Japan had realised the urgent need to modernise. With the change, came the destruction of the long heritage of the samurai with the establishment of Haito-rei, the law prohibiting warriors from carrying swords. Still, some schools of bujyutsu survived, preserving the traditional values of the warrior class.

Morihei Ueshiba, born five years after the Meiji restoration, studied in several of the surviving bujyutsu schools, including swordsmanship in the Shinkage School and jujitsu in the Kito and Daito schools. He joined the Imperial Japanese Army and fought in the Russo-Japanese War of 1905-1906. This early taste of war, coupled with other experiences during the two World Wars, forged Morihei Ueshiba's opposition to the use of martial arts for destructive purposes.

Beginning in his early thirties, with the opening of his first dojo, he searched ceaselessly for the true meaning of budo as a path for the spiritual development of man. In 1942, twenty-two years after the opening of the first Ueshiba dojo in Ayabe, Japan, "aikido" was officially recognised as the name of Morihei Ueshiba's art. For the next forty-six years until his death at the age of 86, O-Sensei, as he came to be known, taught and trained students vigorously in the art, and in the process earned a reputation of unshakeable fame in Japan and around the world.

The Nature of Aikido Training

The most outstanding feature of physical training found in aikido is the repetitive practice of various motions known as kata (forms), until rational and unforced movement flows naturally throughout the body. By unifying body, mind and ki (internal energy), and by utilising internal order together with physical balance, the hidden potential of each person may be expressed through the dynamism of technique. Using circular motions, aikido harmonises and neutralises the aggressor's force. Training involves physical, mental, spiritual and ethical disciplines. It includes empty hand techniques, sword, stick and knife defences. Unique among the martial arts, aikido minimises the need to maintain control of situations.

The fact that there are no competitions in aikido is a logical conclusion of its philosophy. Since winning and losing are never a concern, the trainees are free to dedicate their efforts to mutual goals. It is therefore possible for men, women and children of all ages to walk together down the path of budo, the heart of aikido. One trains and progresses at one's own pace, finding harmony through personal development. Regular practice brings a sense of well-being and self-confidence that permeates all aspects of daily life. As people with varying personalities and lifestyles come together for practice sessions, they gain concrete experience in reconciling different points of view. In aikido, there is no "Way" except the path of confronting "the enemy" that lies within oneself. Aikido is a path of dogged perseverance and dedication to improving both spirit and body. The recognition and acceptance of this aspect of training are the surest means to consistent personal development. Aikido training strives for growth through self-discovery: learning one's true nature and potential and utilising this knowledge in daily life.

Aikido is not only a spiritual discipline but also involves physical mastery. We learn to respect others through mutual physical contact. In this way, a means of communication is established which transcends the barriers of lifestyle, language, culture and race. Aikido, as a martial Way for all people, is like a compass which directs the completion and unification of each person's mind, body and spirit with the fundamental, creative and vital spirit of the universe. It is the Way of the Guardian of all beings.

The Principles of Aikido Training

Taiiku (bodily achievement)

The harmonious development of the body reveals us to be a microcosm of the universe while it continues to purify the body through training. Through physical mastery, we gain the power known as kokyuryoku (the power in the breath of heaven and earth). This power comes from the realisation that we are one with the universe.

Kiiku (spiritual development)

The concepts of "enemy" and "fear" are perceptions of karmic consciousness or illusion, in which the world appears separate from the self. Aikido is not an art of defeating the enemy. A state of "no fear" comes from increasing self-confidence and awareness of being at one with the universe. Our true spiritual strength can only be revealed when the barrier of self-isolation is broken down.

Tokuiku (moral or ethical achievement)

This is the development of the moral or ethical aspect of the self, placing the principle of oneness with the universe into daily life. The path of truthfulness is realised through commitment and practice.

Chiiku (intellectual achievement)

The attainment of wisdom comes from an increasing awareness of the reality of oneness with the universe.

Jyoshiki no Kanyo (cultivation of common sense)

Common sense in its most profound interpretation is the recognition of and respect for all living things. The definition of the true martial Way is therefore to be the guardian of all beings embodying the principle of reverence towards all life.

These five principles of aikido are found in every technique. Simultaneous development of these elements leads to ideal personal development. The diversity of beings and the realisation of oneness are not contradictory concepts. The apparent contradiction is perfectly reconciled within the eternal and supreme code of the laws of nature.