



Ganshinkan Dojo-Salt Lake City, Utah

Affiliated with the California Aikido Association (CAA)

I. WHAT IS AIKIDO?

Of those questions which the visitor is most likely to first ask about Aikido, none is more difficult to answer than the question, "What exactly is Aikido all about?" The most obvious answer is that Aikido is a remarkably effective form of self-defense which has earned for itself a well-deserved reputation among practitioners of the martial arts. Unfortunately although this answer is truthful, it does not tell us in what ways Aikido represents a truly distinctive kind of martial art. Stated in the simplest way, Aikido teaches that proficiency in its techniques depends upon the unification of the TOTAL PERSON. We must learn to utilize and coordinate ALL our vital powers -- not only our physical powers but our spiritual and psychological powers as well -- if we are to realize the fullest potential of Aikido's art. This achievement of mind and body coordination constitutes Aikido's most fundamental objectives. An analysis of the word Aikido itself may also help us to understand something of its purpose and meaning.



Ai ... Agreement, oneness, harmony

Ki ... Environment, nature or spirit of the universe

Do ... Road, path, way of life

AIKIDO

*"The way of life
through harmony
with the spirit of the
universe."*

II. HISTORY OF AIKIDO



Master Ueshiba

Those who practice Aikido are deeply indebted to two great men, Master Morihei Ueshiba and Master Koichi Tohei, who are responsible for the art in its present form. Master Ueshiba, Aikido's founder, applied his life-long experiences in the martial arts (bujitsu) - jujitsu, sumo wrestling, and sword and spear fighting) - to its development. On countless occasions, Master Ueshiba, even at an advanced age, demonstrated his ability to defend himself against the simultaneous attack of many men, each well skilled in martial combat and physically stronger than he. Yet Master Ueshiba firmly believed that Aikido should do more than teach a person to fight. For "true victory", he observed, is really "victory over oneself."

One of Master Ueshiba's best known students, Master Tohei, clearly understood the importance of this spiritual aspect of the founder's art. He recognized that effective Aikido technique depended upon the harmonious unification of mind and body. Master Tohei successfully translated the original teachings into principles which could be used in formal instruction, and it is to him that we owe the wide dissemination and consequent popularization of aikido in America.

III. PRINCIPLES OF AIKIDO

Let us now look at some of these principles which may help us to understand Aikido's methods and techniques. Aikido is often referred to as a "non-fighting art," which may seem like a strange way of describing a martial art. This expression does not mean that the Aikidoist does not respond to an aggressive action. Aikido does teach, however, that an effective response to threat does not have to be a violent one. In fact, we learn that anger and strength are self-defeating because the attacker's aggressive energy can be turned to his complete disadvantage. The greater his force or anger, the more certain we are to defeat him.

When threatened, the Aikidoist does not assume any special defensive poses or postures. His hands are not raised either to guard against a punch or to throw one. He is relaxed, but completely alert. This calmness allows him to perceive the nature of his opponent's attack and, by blending with the energy flow of this attack **WITHOUT RESISTANCE**, he is able to neutralize it. While much of Aikido training is devoted to techniques of neutralization, it also stresses the importance of maintaining calmness under stress, for a fundamental principle is that technique and calmness of execution cannot be separated.

We are also taught in Aikido never to initiate an aggressive act or engage in a fight if it can be avoided. But the Aikidoist does have the ability to respond effectively to whatever degree of threat a situation may offer. Since the techniques of Aikido can be very dangerous, however, they must always be controlled by ethical principles and never used without discretion. Respect and concern for all living things represents a basic Aikido teaching.

Since Aikido is not competitive (each person competes only to realize his or her own goals), we freely share our experiences in order to help each other. This spirit of sharing, however, is not limited to our Dojo training only, but is to be extended to all those we meet in our daily lives.

To those accustomed to the formal discipline demanded by other martial arts, the relaxed and friendly attitude of Aikido training may seem somewhat strange. Aikidoists, however, feel that their training should bring them good and happy feelings. Play and work, teaching and learning, seriousness and happiness, once our spirits are transformed, prove to be the same thing.

A good deal of time include stretching exercises to keep the body supple and pliable; moving exercises to stress balance and centering; breathing and meditative exercises to develop a relaxed mental attitude; and self-defense techniques to learn self-confidence and self-control. Those only represent, however, different ways to achieve the objective of mind and body coordination. You will continually hear references to the four basic principles of Aikido:

Four Principles

1. *Keep one point*
2. *Relax Completely*
3. *Keep weight underside*
4. *Extend Ki*

These are difficult concepts to put into words, but, as we achieve harmony of mind and body, we achieve also calmness of spirit. By continually applying these principles, we not only develop proficiency in self-defense, but, more important, we learn to lead calmer and therefore more productive and better adjusted lives.

VI. AIKIDO LINEAGE

[Aikido lineage \(PDF\)](#) information courtesy of Ryushinkan Dojo

In parting, we offer a teaching from Lao Tzu, who listed among those things which the superior man prizes most - the virtues of gentleness and humility. "By being gentle a man can be bold... by being humble he becomes a leader of men."

In Aikido we seek peace and harmony for others by achieving peace and harmony within ourselves.

We cordially invite you to share these experiences with us.
Veera Kasicharernvat, Instructor

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