

What is Aikido?

The Japanese word Aikido consists of three characters which can be translated as "the way of unity with the fundamental force of the universe."

Aikido is a true Budo or "Martial Way." It has evolved in the historic tradition of Japanese warrior arts. It must be understood that studies in earnest Budo is more than a science of tactics and self-defense; it is a discipline for perfecting the spirit.

Aikido was developed by Morihei Ueshiba, known to thousands of students of Aikido throughout the world as O-Sensei (Great Teacher). Even as a young man, Morihei Ueshiba was an extraordinary martial artist; a master of the sword, the staff, the spear, as well as the art of ju-jitsu. But O-Sensei also had a strong spiritual drive, and brooded over the futility of a path based on victory over others.

Leading a life of austerity and rigorous training, O-Sensei struggled with this dilemma. He delved deeply into the study of religion, especially Shinto, (Japan's native religion of nature worship). The dilemma was resolved in a moment of profound awakening. Transformed by his spiritual insights, Ueshiba transmuted his technical mastery of traditional martial arts into a new martial art. The art of Aikido was one that was fundamentally different from those that preceded it. It was also one of refinement and astonishing power.

"The secret of Aikido," he wrote, "is to harmonize with the movement of the universe and bring ourselves into accord with the universe itself."

O-Sensei maintained that Budo is a work of love, a path to overcome discord in ourselves and bring peace to the world, "To make the heart of the universe one's own heart." O-Sensei taught that true awareness is not grasped by intellect alone. "This is not mere theory," he said. "You must practice it."

Dynamics Of Aikido

The essence of all Aikido technique is the use of total body movements to create spherical motion around a stable, energized center. Even when a technique appears to be using only one part of the body, close observation reveals the Aikidoist's movements are, in fact, total body movements. Properly executed, some techniques are spectacular; sending an opponent flying thorough the air. Others are small, deft movements that immobilize the aggressor. Both results are achieved through precise use of leverage, inertia, gravity, and the action of centrifugal and centripetal forces. Ultimately, it is the energy of the attack itself which brings down the attacker.

Aikido Training

The final aim of Budo is personal transformation. Its goal is the creation of integrated human beings who are able to bring the totality of their wisdom and capabilities in order to resolve a problem. Yet philosophical discussion is rare in the dojo, (training hall). The focus is highly practical. Constant repetition to master the fundamentals of movement, timing and breathing is the fundamental requirement. Students train themselves to capture the opponent's action and redirect it with techniques of martial efficiency and power. At the same time, they become aware of the tendency to overreact to opposition, and learn to remain *centered* under all conditions.

Most practice is done with a partner. Each works at his or her own level of ability, alternating as *uke* (the attacker), and *nage* (the one who receives the attack). Both roles are stressed as each contributes skills that enhance overall sensitivity and control.

Increased stamina, flexibility, and muscle development occur naturally as a result of training, but the techniques themselves do not depend on strength for effectiveness. Since Aikido's movements and techniques arise from the most efficient utilization of the entire being, great power can be developed by the practitioner, regardless of physical strength. Aikido practice encompasses a broad range of training styles, and allows people to train based on their individual stage of development. As a result, Aikido can be practiced by men, women and children of all ages.

Centering

The Aikidoist develops a relaxed posture in which the weight of the body is directed towards its physiologic center in the lower abdomen. Gravity is no longer a force to be overcome. Rather it serves to support and stabilize posture. As a result, ordinary movement assumes an appearance of grace and economy. The effects of centering are mental as well as physical. In addition vitality increases, the senses are sharpened, and one is less affected by the irritations and annoyances of daily living. This state is referred to in Japan as having *hara*, or strong *ki*. It is a manifestation of the inner quality which aids the student of Aikido to develop to his or her fullest potential in every area of life.