

# THE AIKIDOKA WITHIN

## WHAT AIKIDO IS TO ME

Aikido has been given many titles and explanations to me over the past few years which I have been training – from the generic “way of harmony”, to 1 hour lectures at seminars to illustrate that particular sensei’s understanding, to YouTube user flammers stating the rubbish it is and how it’s the most useless idea in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. From my perspective it’s probably the most useful practice in the 21<sup>st</sup> century – because we lead such modern and busy lives – we don’t take that time to stop and think about what we’re doing and the effect it has on ourselves and the people around us. The modern man is impatient like this and wants everything right now, without the realization of consequences which could follow.

When Aikido was developed, it was made with the idea of a metaphor in mind. O Sensei created a martial arts system which anthropomorphized the way he wanted human beings to live their daily lives. This is why Aikido is very unique in its training and practice, because it’s much more than what happens on the mat.

## WAY OF HARMONY

The most common expression used to explain what Aikido is that you’ll often find on sites like Wikipedia to gain a general understanding is the direct translation - “the way of harmony”. Several institutions adapt this one step further with translation such as “the way of harmonious energy”. Besides this being quite airy fairy, it’s actually quite cryptic to the outsider’s understanding – and was so to me until, quite recently, I got an explanation from my sensei. The way of harmony is directly related to the nature in which we train – which is cooperatively. By the first sounds of this, when you think about it, to train cooperatively is what most skeptics will point out about the art. It can’t be used in a real situation because your attacker won’t be cooperative. But think about it a little harder and note other martial arts – I can’t think of many where, when learning basics, your partner isn’t somewhat cooperative. This allows us to learn the technique so that if need be, we can successfully use it.

Aikido techniques have a lot of opportunity for atemi, which are strikes and other movements done to take the mind of your uke. O Sensei, himself, said that atemi is 70% of the effect; technique is the other 30%. Note that atemi is not solely a physical strike; it can be various movements that take the mind – ki-ai being one of these ideas. It’s important to remember that, although we are nice to each other on the mat (to allow us to learn), a kick to the groin and a gouge to the eyes is easily possible and will allow most Aikidoka to perform their technique with great ease.

## SELF DEFENSE SYSTEM

As mentioned earlier, O Sensei didn't develop the Aikido system purely for self-defense, but rather to personify how human beings should live. With that in mind, I feel it's important to reiterate that Aikido shouldn't be taken up if you're looking to beat people up, or show off what moves you can do. In order to become a true practitioner of Aikido, your energy must match the energy of the universe – and to do this, one must let go of his or her ego. In saying that, though, I feel that the principles of Aikido can easily be applied to a self-defense situation, in that there are various movements, ideas and techniques which can help neutralize an opponent. But more importantly than that, Aikido offers principles which help defuse a situation before it turns into situation -- a life lesson much more valuable than disarming an attacker.

## PRINCIPLES OVER TECHNIQUE

As just mentioned, I think it's more beneficial for someone to be able to defuse a situation than disarm an attacker, because in life, situations don't always come in the form of a person starting a fight. Situations can come in the form of a business deal, relationships, and 1 to 1 contact with other people. O Sensei didn't want his pupils to go home thinking they had a way to defend themselves, he wanted them to go home knowing that they had the power resolve issues without conflict. Aikido is about stopping something before it starts, about blending with your life partner so that you and he/she live a happier life. This is where the harmonious practice comes into play. Aikido is about knowing that when life knocks you down, you don't fall flat on your face and submit, it's about learning to roll out of those situations and stand back up on your feet – the purpose of Ukemi.

## METAPHOR UPON METAPHOR

As you can see by a lot of the explanations I've given, there's a lot more to Aikido than simple techniques – and it's a lot to take in. This is also why Aikido is not a 1 week course you can take and get the certificate for, it's a lifelong practice which is about forever growing, learning and letting go of your ego. When you accept that you are not in control of the universe around you and can take a hit but still get back up -- that will allow you to be happier.

O Sensei taught Aikido as a way of life, he wanted the world to treat each other with respect and learn to get back up when being hit to the floor.