



KEGANIN NO SENSHI AIKIDO

WHAT IS AIKIDO?

Aikido is unique among the martial arts in that its purpose is to teach conflict resolution rather than fighting tactics. The philosophy behind Aikido stresses that one should strive to care just as much about one's attacker as about one's self. Those proficient in Aikido can neutralize an attacker while minimizing the amount of harm to all involved. The most difficult and important part of Aikido lies in confronting "the enemy" that lies within oneself.

Aikido has arisen out of the Japanese tradition of martial arts and Budo [*“Code of right living.”*] However, Aikido is to martial arts as Bach is to music. It builds on, yet transcends, what has come before. Aikido goes beyond the usual conflict/suppression tactics of most martial arts to the more highly effective utilization of conflict/collaboration stratagems. When applied throughout our lives, the principles of Aikido are a way through which we can live fuller, more effective lives as individuals and members of human society.

Aikido is an effective form of self-defense. It is also a powerful form of active meditation and a practical system of personal development. It enables one to achieve “mindfulness”, being totally “in the moment”, while moving through a technique or through a life situation. The most outstanding feature of Aikido is that it utilizes internal order, together with physical balance, to bring about dynamic technique. It translates universal principles, such as centeredness, balance, cause and effect, and energy flow, into physical applications, making use of psychology, body mechanics, and the laws of physics to blend an attacker's aggressive energy with our own and bring us both to a place where we are both safe and secure. Using circular motions, Aikido harmonizes, neutralizes and blends with the aggressor's force. Students train themselves to blend with the opponent's energy/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. The main principle in the execution of techniques is to control the aggressor without inflicting injury. This is done by redirecting the force of attack. The techniques of Aikido don't fight with an attacker, they allow us to put aggressors off balance and to bring their energy safely under our control.

Systematic practice results in overall body conditioning by increasing flexibility and strength. Firmness, stability, elegance, and artistic expression are what make Aikido a beautiful and powerful martial art. We learn a relaxed posture in which the weight of the body is directed towards its physiological center in the lower abdomen. Gravity, no longer a force to be overcome, serves to support and stabilize posture. The effects of centering are mental as well as physical: vitality increases, the senses are sharpened, and one is less affected by everyday irritations and annoyances. Increased stamina, flexibility, and muscle development occur naturally as a result of training, but the techniques themselves do not depend on strength for effectiveness. Aikido can be practiced by men and women of all ages and physical abilities/disabilities.

Aikido training is a cooperation between two partners. One partner, called "tori" [*student*] practices a technique while the other, "uke" [*teacher*] uses learned skills to “attack”, absorb techniques without being injured and enable tori to learn a technique. Partners alternate between being tori and uke. This tends to keep them considerate of each other.

Aikido teaches tori how to control conflict by blending with the attack energy and seeking the path that ensures the survival of the defender and the safety of all parties. This can include any area of conflict or problem solving, not merely physical. The practice of Aikido provides an effective approach to life and living. It fosters self-confidence and peace of mind within the context of action and provides profound benefits in many areas of a practitioner's life.

The basic principles of Aikido are balanced, centered movement; deliberateness of action and acceptance of responsibility; being focused and relaxed; joining and collaboration; non-aggressive intervention; compassionate use of power; and the universality of cause and effect.

O Sensei taught that the essence of Aikido is to develop loving kindness for others and for ourselves. By learning how to be in harmonious relationship with ourselves, we learn to be in harmony with others and our environment. We practice the techniques of Aikido, not as a means to become more defended, but rather, in order to reach out from the center of who we are, to truly connect with others, the environment, the universe.

We do not propose to translate or interpret the exact meaning of O Sensei's words. What does come across clearly in everything ascribed to him is that Aikido is the art of peace, that he meant for Aikido to bring peace to the world, and that one cannot bring peace to the world if one does not have peace within one's self. If the essence of O Sensei's universal peace is that point where positive and negative are in balance, where constructive and destructive are one, where the one point of all lies centered in the midst of chaos, then we cannot hope to contribute to this peace unless we first achieve that essence, that centered, balanced, compassionate peace with in ourselves.