

Practicing the Art of Peace

Aikido is a modern martial art that is founded by spirituality and philosophy influenced by the Omoto-kyo religion associated with the Aikido founder Morihei Ueshiba. The etymology of the word Aikido stems from three Japanese characters. "Ai" literally means joining, with "ki" meaning something like spirit, and "do" meaning way. Loosely translated then, the meaning of Aikido is the way of joining the spirit.

The Aikido way is to align body and mind with the spirit or ki and it said that the only way to be able to do this is through cultivating a relaxed state. It is in this relaxed state that nothing is forced or contrived so the mind and body naturally join the spirit or energy and everything becomes one. It is this oneness and cultivation of relaxation that this martial art paradoxically gets referred to as the art of peace. Its founder Ueshiba was a pacifist and it is said that he taught Aikido as a peaceful means to end aggression.

Although spiritual and philosophical development is important in Aikido training, it has to be put to practical means and examples in actual practice of Aikido techniques and methods. Aikido training usually consists of two parties. The first is called uke or the receiving body and the other is known as nage (although this term varies depending on the Aikido style being taught) who gives the technique being taught.

This concept of uke and nage can be likened to the Chinese yin and yang because in Aikido, uke and nage are not separate entities. They are two parts of one where the Aikido training can be learned with give and take from both parties. For instance, one of the first techniques taught in Aikido training is how to throw and fall safely. It is the task of nage to prevent injury to uke so he can learn to land safely when thrown.

Furthermore, in Aikido training, the receiver or uke usually initiates an attack against the nage whose aim is to neutralize the assault with an Aikido move or technique. This way, both the uke and nage learn from each other and the Aikido training is not successfully executed without oneness between the two. It is in the give and take of these two entities in Aikido training that the principles of ki and other fundamentals of Aikido techniques are learned.

Such fundamentals are the principles of adapting, flexibility, calmness and blending. In the case of uke and nage, Aikido training teaches uke to be more flexible and relaxed so that nage will not be able to catch them unaware and throw them off balance. On the other hand, nage learns to blend and adapt to be able to control and assuage the assaulting energy from uke. Aikido training

however is not exclusive to practice and parries between just two parties. In fact, Aikido training involves instruction for multiple attackers.

This is called randori and is a vital and required lesson to be learned in higher levels of Aikido training. The Aikido training for multiple attacks is done "freestyle" where a person can further expand their knowledge by practicing and performing Aikido techniques beyond the structured environment of the uke and nage. These are only two methods of Aikido training. There are many other training methods and techniques that follow the core value of Aikido.