

Knowing the basics of Aikido

Aikido is one of the oldest form of martial arts. Founded by Morihei Ueshiba, aikido came about through the studies of many different kinds of traditional martial arts. In fact, is often perceived as a form of exercise or a dance because of some of its forms. It is also viewed by some quarters as some form of martial mesmerism.

Aikido is even confused with Daito Ryu Aikijutsu, it is different in its essence. Still, its founder attributed his creation of aikido to the way, his master Sokaku Takeda, grandmaster of Daito Ryu, opened his eyes to the nature of Budo.

What is aikido?

Despite its many perceived forms, aikido is a Budo or martial arts. It is the refinement of the techniques that are being taught in traditional martial arts and is combined with a philosophy that calls on for the power of the spirit. In its essence, it is a blending of the body and the mind.

Its philosophy is basically derived from the belief that deceptions and trickery or brute force will not make us defeat our opponents. Instead, concentration that involves the spirit will be enough to strengthen us.

Aikido is also used as a way to discover our true paths so that we can develop our individuality. It also teaches its practitioners to unify their body and their mind so that they will become in harmony with the "universe" and with nature. Their power and their strength will come from this balance and harmony.

The word "universe" in aikido is not some obscure concept that one cannot achieve. It is actually quite concrete and is even within the grasp of the person. In aikido, "universe" can be achieved through actual experiences and everyday life.

Aikido's movements and techniques are circular. When a circle is created in aikido, the person is said to be protected from a collision from an opposing force. A firm center, however, is needed to create this circle. An example of a firm circle is a spinning top that turns at fast speed. Without a firm center, the speed of movement will only create imbalance. The stillness of the spinning top while in speeding motion is what is called sumikiri in Aikido language. This is achieved only by what Aikido founder calls "total clarity of mind and body." However, this is not so easily achieved. It takes a long time of study and practice in order to find this intense concentration and centeredness.

Training is important in aikido as well as concentration because while it may be easy to create a centered being when inside a martial arts gym, the same cannot be said of situations and circumstances outside. It will not be easy to keep one's composure when faced with extraordinary circumstances. This is actually one of the goals of Aikido training. It aims to teach its practitioners to maintain their composure and their centeredness even in panic situations such as danger and calamities.

One method taught in aikido is to breathe with what is called the seika tanden point. This is the part of the body that can be found two inches below the navel. Controlled breathing is one key to being one with the universe and to center oneself with nature. When a person learns to do this, he or she will feel extraordinary calmness that they can use in the practice of aikido.