



NO COMPETITION

In aikido, there are no fights or competitions. The essence of aikido is captured in the saying 'masakatsu agatsu, katsuha-yahi'. 'Masakatsu agatsu' translates as 'true victory is self-victory' meaning that the purpose of aikido is not to prove one's strength in contest with another person.

Rather, the competition is with oneself and the goal is the forging and tempering of one's body and mind through the mental, physical and spiritual discipline of regular training. This is also why, during training, we work in pairs or groups, taking turns to be shite (the one who performs the technique) and uke (the one who receives the technique).

CULTIVATING LEADERS

The simple study of aikido techniques has its limits. We can only truly begin to gain a deeper understanding of aikido techniques by teaching them to others. Therefore, in aikido classes it is not only the teacher who teaches. Senior students will naturally and by example help and teach junior students. Demonstrating and explaining a technique will often lead to revelations about that technique. Teaching others can also increase confidence and becomes another pleasurable aspect of training. In aikido, we see the truth of the maxim that the more you give, the more you will receive.

THE PHYSICAL HEALTH BENEFITS OF AIKIDO

We have already mentioned that the basic movements in aikido are particularly effective in developing a strong core and lower body. Many of the movements in aikido also work towards developing a leaner and more flexible physique and aikido can also provide a good cardiovascular workout, increasing general stamina and fitness. Furthermore, in kamae (the basic stance from which all aikido techniques are performed) and while performing techniques the focus is on keeping the body's center line and the back and neck perfectly straight and the chest open, which helps to improve posture. All aikido techniques are practised on both the left and right sides meaning that both sides of the brain are used and that there is no imbalance between the left and right sides of the body. Aikido uses many joint-locking techniques that gently stretch wrist and elbow joints in the direction that they naturally bend, promoting flexibility of the joints. This is particularly important in combatting aging, as stiff ankles and wrists can severely limit our mobility as we grow older. In addition, it is believed that these joint-locking techniques stimulate various vital therapeutic points on the body, improving blood circulation and strengthening the immune system.



AIKIDO IS ABOUT CONNECTING

Many aikido techniques start with your partner grasping one or both hands directly, forming a vital physical connection in a highly technological world where much of our communication and contact is electronic and impersonal. Some students are uncomfortable with this direct physical contact at first. However, most overcome this (and other) phobias and complexes; gaining confidence and the ability to interact face-to-face. This training also develops the vital inter-personal skill of being able to read your partners emotions and intentions, a skill not developed through e-mail and instant messaging. Finally, the dojo provides a place where people gather to communicate on completely equal terms, without reference to age; gender; occupation or nationality; and aikido provides the common language.

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Yoshinkan Aikido



Soke Gozo Shioda
Yoshinkan Aikido Founder



養神館合気道



AIKIDO ANCIENT AND MODERN

Aikido is a fairly new martial art that only became widely known after World War II when Ueshiba Sensei began to teach new techniques based on an ancient Japanese martial art called Daitoryu aikijujutsu. The techniques of Daitoryu aikijujutsu are said to have had their beginnings around 800 years ago when Shinra Saburo Yoshimitsu, descendant of the Emperor Seiwa, observed how a spider was still able to catch large insects in the delicate threads of its web. Thus, we can say that aikido is both an ancient and a modern martial art.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CENTER

Rather than struggling in vain against the force of an attack, one of the main principles of aikido is to use the aggressor's own power against them in order to subdue them without undue force or injury. This is done using a series of circular, flowing movements. In aikido, there are very few straight or linear movements. Instead, we imagine the movements of the upper and lower body and the arms as tracing along the circumference of a sphere.

However, for these movements to be effective they require a strong base or core. For this reason, much of aikido training is aimed at developing a strong center.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BASICS

In Yoshinkan Aikido, great emphasis is based on the study of the kihon dosa or basic movements. Through repetitive training in these movements we develop a strong core and lower body, as well as the ability to maintain a stable posture while moving. All aikido techniques contain some element of these basic movements so it follows that if we can do the basic movements, we will naturally be able to do the techniques. It also means that we must be very careful from the beginning to create and maintain correct form when studying the basic movements and techniques.

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GRATITUDE

As mentioned above, in aikido we train in pairs or groups taking turns to be *shite* and *uke*. It is impossible to practise aikido techniques alone - only by practising on people of all different shapes and sizes can we begin to understand how a technique works and to improve on that technique. There are as many different body types (and personalities) as there are people and obviously, during the course of our training we will come across partners on whom our techniques fail to work or people we don't get along with. These are the partners we should be the most grateful for because by training with them we become more self-aware and we can learn to adjust and refine our technique. This is not only valuable training physically but with this mindset we learn to tackle the challenges of daily life in a positive manner and to be grateful for them as an opportunity for personal growth. Furthermore, we can gain valuable lessons in our approach to inter-personal relationships and inter-personal conflict.

AIKIDO TAKES TIME

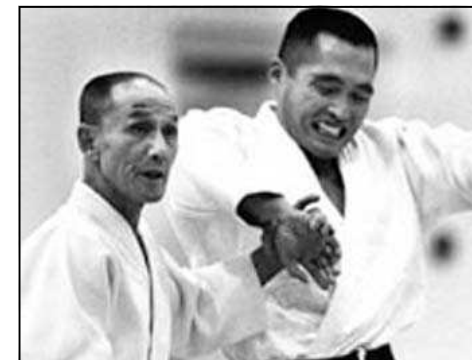
People and their attitudes towards life vary widely. Those who approach life in a positive way will be able to overcome all manner of difficulties. The development of this positive attitude is another one of the goals of aikido training and again we look to nature to inspire and guide us. Thus in Japan they have *shochugeiko* and *kangeiko* (or Summer and Winter training - a week of continuous 6 am training during the hottest and coldest part of the year respectively). By willingly submitting ourselves to the hardship of training at these times, we turn what would normally be a trial into something to be looked forward to and enjoyed. However, like nature and the revolution of the seasons, the development of this ability takes time.

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AIKIDO AND NATURAL PRINCIPLES

So far, we have been viewing aikido from the personal or human level and on this level, the scale of aikido covers everyone; from children to adult men and women of all ages and from all around the world. But aikido is in fact much wider than this in scope. It encompasses all of nature; or rather, all of nature is embodied in aikido. So we see that the earth is surrounded and protected by the ozone layer or Japan is surrounded and protected by the ocean. In the same way, in aikido a person is like a castle and their ki or spirit is like a moat, surrounding and protecting them. The spirit is also the lord and protector of the castle - if the moat and the lord are weak, the castle will also be weak and fall quickly under attack. Therefore, by studying aikido's techniques we can strengthen our defences in accordance with natural principles.



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