

Aikido: A usable martial art?

By Dean Heilmann

Is Aikido a useable martial art? The answer to this question truly lies in the your definition of a “usable martial art” or maybe more importantly, what you want to use it for. Do you want an art that will help to keep you from getting into bad situations before they start? Or, maybe you are looking for an art that can be a source of spirituality. Possibly you are looking for a form of meditation or a fun way to stay in shape. Then, there is always the defense from physical attack.

Aikido teaches us to blend with energy being directed at us. This doesn't necessarily mean physical energy. It could mean the energy being directed at you by someone you are in an argument with. It could be your boss, teacher, co-worker, significant other or even a drunk in a bar you are in. The first thing Aikido teaches us is to get off the line, out of the way of the attack. In an argument this would mean changing your position. Not physically, but by mentally changing your point of view. Next we learn to blend. This would mean looking at the situation from the other person's point of view. By doing this, now you have seen both sides of the argument and will be in a better position to bring the conflict to a harmonious conclusion. No physical contact needs to be made. In this way Aikido has helped you to stay away from an unpleasant or possibly violent situation before it arises.

One of the first translations that the author of this paper ever heard for the word Aikido was “The way of harmony with the spirit of the universe”. This is, of course, a loose translation but it perfectly underlines the spiritual side of the art. It has nothing to do with a specific “God”, but whatever your definition of the spirit of the universe might be. Because of this, it can be used in conjunction with other forms of religion or as its

own form of spirituality. It's about being in harmony with that spirit, and all beings in the universe. Aikido doesn't lay down laws of things we can or cannot do, or a punishment if we break those laws. As a result, unlike many "organized religions" it is a form of spirituality that could never be used to start a war but only to bring people together. You either follow the Way of Harmony, or you don't. Maybe the word "try" should be interjected there because to truly follow the Way is an extremely difficult thing but the person who truly tries will only become a better human being.

Meditate – transitive verb **1**: to focus one's thoughts on: reflect on or ponder over (Merriam Webster Dictionary). Aikido requires that you get out of the way of a physical attack, making contact with the attacker and blending with the energy of the attack in order to take control of the attacker's balance, and maintaining control of the attacker's balance in order to position them for a pin or throw them away from you. All of this must be done while maintaining your own balance and not hurting your attacker or getting hurt yourself. To learn to do this requires all of the focus that one can muster. Ask anyone, who trains in Aikido, if they have the ability to think of other things while they are truly training and trying to better their ability to do the art. Sure you can think of other things between techniques, but then you are not concentrating on what you need to do to make it better the next time and at this point Aikido becomes more of a fun way to get exercise.

Whether or not Aikido can be used as a defensive art depends entirely on how you train. If you treat Aikido as if it were a dance in which complete cooperation between Uke and Nage is necessary, then the answer will be no, it is not going to be very effective as a defensive art. Training in this way is great for teaching beginners. While the Aikidoka is learning the techniques and getting the basics down, full cooperation is a great tool to give the new student confidence and to help them understand the mechanics of the art. If you want to be able to use Aikido as a defensive art however, you must learn

to take the balance of someone who does not want to have his or her balance taken. You must train with someone who is trying to regain control and bring the attack to you. This type of training should be reserved for Shodan or possibly Nidan levels and above. A good understanding of the techniques and, more importantly, ukemi is necessary for this type of training. Not that advanced students should quit training in the first style, but in order to use it as a true martial art both training methods are necessary.

O Sensei created Aikido as a defensive art. The Tokyo riot police and other law enforcement agencies around the world prove every day that it can be used as such. Millions of people across the globe use Aikido for spiritual reasons, as a meditation, as a fun way to stay in shape, and to bring harmony into their everyday lives. These are just a few of the ways in which people use Aikido to enrich and better their lives. So maybe the question isn't "Is Aikido a use able martial art?" but "Is there another martial art that can be used for as many wonderful purposes as Aikido?"