



AIKIDO

HARMONY IN TRAINING

Aikido is an art form learned from people of many different body types, physical abilities, personalities and ages. It is a special form of communication that does not require the spoken or written word. Advanced understanding is received by studying and training with many different partners, by teaching and figuring out how to improve another person's technique, and learning how to achieve a harmonious training experience.

ENERGY AND INTENT

Each person who trains brings an individual history and set of beliefs to the techniques practiced with a partner. No matter what a person's physical talent level is, it is the energy and intention brought into the training that shapes Aikido forms the most. To me, the most beautiful Aikido is expressed by individuals who believe in achieving perfect harmony with their training partners. They have trained their inner energy to reach out to their partner and focus the technique into a singular form. Uke, Nage, it doesn't matter; the intent is the same if they are doing the technique or taking falls for another person.

A person who focuses on attunement with a partner does not automatically have less effective throws than a person with a focused intent on throwing hard or strong. Instead, like water, a harmonizer chooses to find a partner's most efficient path towards the lowest point...the ground. A river will not flow uphill unless it is forced, but a river will run downhill very fast if encouraged. Like water moving along the path of least resistance, the strongest Aikidoists focus on discovering the cleanest path for each body type and person in their training in order to achieve a harmonious training experience.

TRAINING PARTNERS

As a beginning student, one's primary goal is to learn the technical motions that compose a technique. Put the left foot here, move the right hand there, etc. As a person's technical knowledge base increases, the unified motion of each technique become clear and the student can move on to learning why the individual moves come together to make the technique work.

An advanced student is someone who has learned the forms well enough to help others to improve their Aikido. The most important job that an advanced student has is to discover what it is their training partner wants to learn or acquire from Aikido. Some people want to learn how to strengthen their hand-art techniques, some want to focus their energy on weapons, and some simply want to partake in a physical activity that will boost their confidence and give them exercise. No matter the goal, there are ways of training that can help both people practice what they have come to work on.

I think that respecting one's training partners and their training goals is the primary responsibility a student has. Unlike other martial arts that might focus on katas or movements that only involve one individual, in Aikido it is impossible to progress or learn techniques without a partner. To train is to gain an understanding of the energy received from another person and react appropriately. In some cases this may mean to defend oneself against negative or harmful energy, but in other cases this can be to unite with positive energy. I would describe the energy of a good training partner as positive since his or her intent is not to harm others during training. Instead, the intent is to help a fellow student's progression in Aikido by creating the opportunity for he or she to practice a technique.

Anyone who has ever needed to move something very heavy with multiple people helping knows how crucial it is for all the people involved to move the object in the same direction, at the same speed, and at the same time. The idea of harmonious training in Aikido can be seen in the same way. It is an opportunity for a group of students with a similar interest in martial arts to all work together intent of helping each other progress in the art. Since all basic training in Aikido is dependent on someone else to help practice the forms, a training partner is **always** your teacher, even if he or she is less advanced than you.

HARMONY AND CARE

Aikido is not a fighting art, it is the art of blending with another person. Harmonized training occurs when training partners strive to discover how they can help each other to improve mutual technique and training experience. It is based on the understanding that an Aikido technique involves two people, an uke and a nage, and that both people desire to progress. This is why it is unacceptable to prevent a person from completing a technique; it is not the strength of a individual person's technique or attack that is important, it is the unified intent of separate individuals to work together on improvement that embodies Aikido.

I find it extremely unethical for any student, but especially an advanced student who has the knowledge to accurately control techniques, to train with others in such a way that could cause them injury. There is no way that any other person can know the extent to which the opportunity to train impacts a fellow student; Aikido might be a simple hobby, or it might be the activity that serves as the glue that keeps a person's life from falling into disarray. To injure someone and thereby prevent them from training, or make training an unpleasant or painful experience, is unforgivable behavior. Students may be forced to quit in order to avoid this unpleasant contact, robbing them of their training and the rest of the dojo of their experience, spirit, and unique presence on the mat.

Training to become a good uke and blending with others helps not only the individuals immediately effected by the technique, but ultimately increases the long term advancement and unification of the entire dojo. The techniques learned today will be taught to others tomorrow, continuing the tradition of the art form and expanding its richness as different people bring their own ideas and spirit to the art.

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