

## The Mind of Aiki

I've been training in Aikido for nearly eight years. I have spent most of this time living in the dojo as an uchi deshi. Aikido has become my life, and everything that I do reflects the impact that Aikido has made upon me. Aikido is not just a system of self-defense. It is a way of strengthening the body, and harnessing the power of the mind through the application of the concept of Aiki. It is the aspect of Aiki within Aikido training that has become the main focus of my training.

In old times, the concept of Aiki was taught within the Minamoto Clan as taking your opponents mind before the battle begins. This was the understanding of Aiki that Sokaku Takeda had when he taught the concept to Morihei Ueshiba before Aikido was founded. Later, this concept of Aiki was expanded upon by Ueshiba Sensei into the current idea of universal consciousness and love that is more closely associated with the art of Aikido.

It is my ambition upon the Aiki path to develop my mental facilities through my training so that I can realize both Takeda Sensei's and Ueshiba Sensei's concepts of Aiki. It is my personal opinion that Takeda's concept of Aiki is more basic than Ueshiba Sensei's concept and, therefore, should be developed first.

Some of the ways that this kind of mental development can begin is through the practice of connection and awareness on the mat, and also the practice of meditation. In order for one to be self-aware, aware of one's uke, and aware of what is going on with everyone else on the mat, one must first establish connection. Really, one does not establish a connection so much as one becomes aware of the connection that already exists. In order for this awareness to take place, one must be in the present moment. When one has their mind in the present moment, one can

begin to feel the connection that they have with everything that is going on around them. The more one remains in the present moment, the more one's feeling of connection expands to include more of their environment and, also, the more that this feeling of connection is refined to include the more subtle aspects of that environment. This connection not only guides one's technique, but it is also the first steps to the realization of both Takeda Sensei's and Ueshiba Sensei's concepts of Aiki.

In the beginning, this feeling of connection is generally physical. It is more readily apprehensible to the mind to feel the less subtle aspects of feeling connected to a physical body. Over time, it is my belief that this feeling can be refined to a point that includes the perception of a connection to people's minds as well. This experience can be greatly enhanced by the practice of meditation.

Meditation is an exercise that develops one's capacity for mental focus. This mental focus can be used to sharpen one's ability to connect with someone to the exclusion of all other thoughts from the mind. When this ability is achieved, connection with the mind of another can be perceived. This would be the first step in the realization of Takeda Sensei's concept of Aiki as a means of taking one's opponents mind.

Admittedly, at my present state I have only begun to perceive the mental connection that I have with other people. I am not sure how far I have to go before I can begin to manipulate this connection into anything beginning to resemble a mind-taking technique. All I can do is practice and experiment. Ultimately, the pursuit of this form of Aiki will hopefully lead me into expanding my consciousness to a level that is similar to what Ueshiba Sensei was talking about when he referred to a universal consciousness and the realization of Aiki as love.