

ZEN in Motion

Don't fight – we do Martial Arts

by

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合気道

You can ask people around the world “Why Aikido?” and I bet you will get many different answers as everyone has his/her own perception and experience with this unique Martial Arts. For me the “Arts” is the dominating part of it, i.e. for me Aikido is really a kind of Art, and to be more specific I like to name it:

“The Art of Motion without Movement”

Effortless appearing movements are also the reason why people who have no relation to Aikido and watch first time high level Aikido masters performance do not see what is going on. And sometimes they say “It's all fake! He did not really beat him but the other guy falls like having received a big blow”. This just illustrates from outside Aikido is difficult to understand. The importance of the economy in receiving and guiding energy is a key issue in understanding Aikido. This is almost impossible to explain in words.



It is now 15 years ago that I had started with Aikido in Germany and I still remember my first lesson with Wolfgang Teubler as it was exactly on my 37th birthday. And after the first lesson we had a chat with other club members and one of the younger guys asked Wolfgang how Aikido can be used in real fighting. The remarkable answer was:

“If you practice Aikido you need not fight!”

Because in Aikido we learn the way of receiving and giving and how to avoid hard confrontation. This also indicates the link between the physical exercising and spiritual aspect of Aikido. There are even people who transfer these principles of Aikido into the field of philosophy and psychology and have developed practical tools for “mediating conflicts with Aikido principles”. That is for example deflecting aggressions in ethnic conflicts without violence, a wonderful way to avoid fighting and even escalation to war. That goes far beyond what beginners may understand at the time when they start with this “Martial Art”, but also shows one of the spiritual facets of this Art and O'Sensei would be proud of such result of his work.



For me also the spiritual aspect of Aikido is very important. In fact this was the reason why I started with it. It was the time after I had begun practicing Zazen and I felt that the calmness and inner peace I found needs to have a complementary physically more active component. A friend of mine, who himself did never practice it recommended Aikido to me, simply due to that he had observed that Aikido people also do some kind of Zazen (sitting quietly) before every practice. That was the link that brought me into Aikido. Some years later I experienced the perfect combination of both in the Zen Dojo Shoshinji with one of my important Aikido teachers Helmut Weiss, who besides a very strict follower of Katsuake Asai style in Aikido is also a priest of Soto Zen. He put it to the point:

“How can you understand movement if you do not understand stillness?”

After many years of exercising I eventually started finding some of the “stillness in the movement” in Aikido. It is not that I have arrived at a level where I really feel the calmness during practice. There is still too much movement, but I can grasp the meaning. It is like you spy through a door which is opened just a small gap and you may just see a very small portion what is behind the door. But this little to see gives enough motivation to continue for further development.



Different styles of Aikido were, in particular as a beginner, very confusing to me. After just half a year after I started with Aikido, I moved to Hanover and there practiced with Kenji Hayashi in his “School for Breathing and Moving” those days still affiliated with Aikikai Germany. Since in earlier years I did a lot of scuba diving and apnoe diving as well as competition swimming I had some experience of how to control my breathing. Also in Zen meditation practice I learned another aspect of breathing control. But it was here in Kenji Hayashi’s dojo where I learned how important the coordination of breathing and executing movements in Aikido is; and this applies for either roll: i.e. as for Tori as well as for Uke.




Another challenge I faced after I moved to near Frankfurt where I joined a The Iwama Ryo Dojo lead by Peter Heurich, a student of Morihiro Seito Sensei. At that stage I really was completely puzzled about what is right or wrong: either the more flowing and interactive style or the resistive clamping style. Just gradually I understand that on the way to reach one destination you may have the choice to take a different route. As the old proverb says:

“Many roads lead to Rome”

it virtually also applies to Aikido. Some teachers say “If you master the techniques from the static stance then you eventually may develop the dynamic

entering as well". But vice versa is just as true and can lead to the same result, i.e. flexible response to the partner and situation.

In addition to above mentioned teachers I must say that my seminars with Katsuaki Asai Shihan with his big movements had a very big influence on my style, in particular during the time 1998 to 2001 when I lived in Beijing and I could only practice Aikido on my trips to Germany where I could participate in several Winter- and Easter-Seminars.



Further inspirations I got through two very exciting Kinomichi Seminars jointly organized by Katsuke Asai and Noro Sensei. Kinomichi is a style developed by the Noro where the "Martial" aspect of Aikido had disappeared even more. There is no more throwing or pinning of uke but just the flow of Ki in a harmonious interaction of two partners, just amazing.

Since I live in Shanghai I concentrate my Aikido as student of Kuniyoshi Nokura Sensei. As a curiously analytical person I always tried to exercise according to his style - or better what I could see in his style. But to my own surprise still today after seven years time to time I from have an enlightening experience when I discover his "real" intention, just in the moment that I enjoy directly practice with Nokura Sensei. That demonstrates to me again, how many subtle differences there are, the hidden "secrets" of each Sensei, which are waiting to be discovered by us students.



Other overwhelming experiences in the past few years were several seminars with Endo Sensei in Nokura Senseis Dojo. Endo Sensei has his unique and eye-opening way of teaching basic things about balancing, sensitive responding and flowing interaction. His movements seem effortless and natural, which I always enjoy very much and which significantly has inspired me for my idea of teaching Aikido.

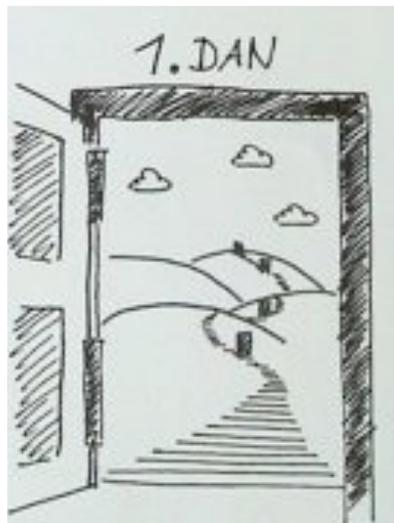
With my preparation for Shodan exam since the beginning of this year I found myself having arrived at a new step in my personal Aikido development. The interesting thing is that I do not feel having really achieved something but it is rather like a new beginning. Having so far struggled with basics now the time for debugging and refining has come. Neither does it mean that my basic techniques are ok., nor do I feel satisfied with this state. But I better understand now where the important parts to improve are and what to work on in my practice. Another aspect is that now in a more mature state the spiritual part will gain greater importance hand in hand with the physical exercising. Moreover I hope to get closer to the stage to leave the fighting behind and



“ find inner calmness while doing Aikido.”

Since I had the pleasure to practice in several dojos and different styles, the world of Aikido appears to me like a colorful bouquet of flowers, all the flowers are different but this is just what makes it so beautiful. It is now the time to see how all these different experiences reflected in my personality, physical and mental preconditions may eventually blend into something natural and influence my Aikido, in the physical as well as the spiritual aspect.

In the future may many inspiring encounters with different masters and other students lead us to better understanding of Aikido and of the spiritual part of the world of O'Sensei Morihei Ueshiba, without whom I would never had have the opportunity to write these words.



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