

Aikidosphere

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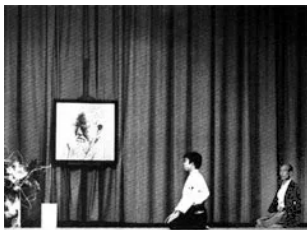
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Aikido Questions and Answers - Part 1

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Aikido can be difficult for modern people to understand. Many only have experience with sports and games that stress pure physical and technical training and organized competition that demands a clear distinction between winner and loser. Since the Aikido approach is not like that, newcomers to the art are often puzzled. In order to make Aikido more accessible, here we will employ a question and answer format to deal with the most common queries. Many of the replies may appear startling at first but once you take up the actual practice of Aikido, you will soon learn to appreciate its unique character.

How does Aikido differ from ordinary sports?

Aikido is Budo. It is a special kind of martial art that stresses spiritual development.

However, it is also true that Aikido has been recognized as member of the GAISF, an international association of sports federations since 1984, so it is not inconceivable to consider Aikido to be a kind of sports like athletic activity. It must be noted, though, that in the World Games sponsored by the GAISF there is no organized competition, and it is free of the hype and commercialism of the Olympic games.

While sports focus entirely on competition, the primary purpose of Aikido is spiritual development of the entire human being. In Aikido, we never resort to trickery, deception, or excessive force to overcome an opponent. This is how Aikido differs from sports.

In the modern world of sports, mental management is often mentioned, but if mind control is only employed to defeat an opponent it does not really facilitate spiritual development. This is why in Japan the Ministry of Education has issued a directive for instructors not to neglect the spiritual aspect of sports education. Many educators now realize that winning is not the end all and be all of sports, and perhaps Aikido and sports will eventually come to share a somewhat similar perspective.

In conclusion, we must state again that the primary purpose of Aikido is spiritual development. It is Budo, and the art emerged from a milieu in which the matter of life and death was decided in an instant. Aikido looks at the entire human being, on the deepest level, something that sports cannot do. Aikido employs the training methods of the traditional martial arts within the context of modern



society.

Why are there no contests in Aikido?

If we think of Budo within the context of contemporary society, it is clear that it must have some other purpose than teaching people how to use martial art techniques to defeat an opponent. Who is interested in that kind of thing anymore? People are interested in doing things that have practical application to their lives. Modern Budo must have some connection with the problems of daily life. This is one reason that "In Aikido, there are no contests."

In Aikido, there is no concept of "defeating an opponent." If contests are allowed, the desire to win, and the desire to vanquish an opponent arises; that fixation makes it impossible to remain in harmony with nature. Such a fixation is in direct opposition to the natural harmony of heaven and earth. The very purpose of Aikido is to unite oneself with nature and act in a harmonious manner with all things in heaven

What is the nature of ki in Aikido? Is it the same as the ch'i employed in the Chinese martial arts?

Once again, we can explain the concept in words but if one does not have any actual experience the reply will have little meaning. If you don't practice, what you have in your head is of little value.

To be sure, the concept of ki is central to Aikido, and the Founder always emphasized the importance of ki. However, the Founder's explanation of ki was profound and difficult to comprehend, especially for people of the modern generation. Some tried to follow what he had to say but others were not that interested in the problem. Or on occasion, the Founder would talk all about ki and then suddenly say with a smile, "It comes directly from the gods!"

There are various ways to interpret the concept of ki but those who practice Aikido sincerely will gradually develop an intuitive understanding of the real nature of ki. If we were to ask an Aikido practitioner about this, a likely answer would be: "When I polish the mind and body, my entire being feels vibrant!"

However, if we were to explain it to new students like this, "Ki is a form of enlightenment; sparks radiate from your belly and pierce the entire universe!" who would believe it? It is best to develop your own understanding of ki through daily training.

Regarding the relationship between ki and ch'i: They are similar but they're applied differently. The concept of ki is, of course, not limited to Aikido, and many martial art and philosophical systems use the term to express the notion of "universal energy" or "life force." There are many points in common between Aikido and the Chinese martial arts but the respective approach is different, and we should not consider them identical. They should be appreciated as two separate and independent systems.

In Aikido, "breath power" (kokyu-ryoku) is emphasized. Is that related to lung capacity?

Aikido breath power is much more than lung capacity. It involves utilization of the entire body. It is not simply breath, but the concentrated power that arises when body and mind are unified. Breath power is crucial for Aikido. Even if one's lung capacity is not increased, one can still attain great and liberating power through unification of body and mind. Breath power and ki are the Source of Aikido strength.

There are no human beings who do not breathe, and everyone does it unconsciously. If breathing ceases, we will quickly depart from this world. Breathing is the most natural of reflexes. Ki and breath power are indivisible, the very being of Aikido.

When I watch people practicing Aikido, they seem to spin around like tops. Can such movements really be effective as martial art techniques?

In reply, let us employ the example of school education. If students only study for questions that appear on entrance exams, their education will be inadequate and incomplete. In any field of endeavor, is it possible to ignore the basics? On the contrary, master the basics and progress will come quickly.

Another approach is to teach in set patterns. In the martial arts, this would be "If that occurs, react like this." This appears to facilitate learning but in fact it is of little help in a real situation. It is impossible to postulate a set response for every contingency, and, in a real situation, you do not have the option of dictating to your opponent what kind of attack he should use.

Let's look at Aikido training methods more closely. We practice seated techniques that have no practical application in modern society-everyone sits in chairs nowadays-but training in such techniques helps you develop strong legs and hips, a solid center, and good breath power. It is not possible for every movement to have a practical application, but training in the basics will eventually give you the ability to make an appropriate response in a real situation.

Furthermore, powerful ki is generated by circular movements. In order to draw a beautiful circle, it is necessary to have a true center. Ki emerges from that center, and it is a source of powerful revolution. If you are even slightly off-center all your power will dissipate, but if you remain on center you can slide around the strongest opposing force. This is a key principle.

The physical movements of Aikido are centered in the seika tanden, the middle of the human body. If you are centered in that one point, you can move in circle, small or large, with true stability and generate great ki power. Aikido practitioners are never just "spinning around."

Are kicks used in Aikido?

No. The Founder had very powerful legs, and on occasion he demonstrated kicking techniques during a demonstration but almost none of those techniques were incorporated into modern Aikido.

As we have mentioned several times, Aikido emphasizes being centered in mind and body, with both feet on the ground, literally and figuratively. Kicks or leg sweeps temporarily hamper that good balance and are thus avoided. Aikido techniques are not put into set patterns, and there is no "If that happens, do this" kind of instruction. We do not usually practice defenses against kicking attacks in Aikido, and many may view that approach as problematic, but in fact if one has a solid foundation in the basics, any kind of attack can be dealt with.

Here is an example. An Aikido instructor in Thailand was challenged by a local kick boxer. Even though the instructor tried to explain that there were no contests in Aikido, the challenger insisted. He launched a kicking attack that the Aikido instructor immediately countered. He then pinned the boxer with the ikkyo technique.

The instructor, who had never trained against kicks, was quite surprised himself how naturally and effectively he had responded. He had no preconceived notion of how to respond so he just reacted naturally, and this reaction was due to his daily training in the Aikido basics.

Is there free-style sparring (randori) in Aikido?

No, for the same reason there are no contests. We never attack first in Aikido, and only move in response to an opponent's aggression, so two Aikido practitioners would not be able to spar. However, we do have a kind of free-style training where one's partner uses a variety of attacks and one is then free to use any Aikido technique.

During Aikido training how much should we resist against the application of a technique? If we resist too much it makes it difficult for a partner to train, and if we do not resist at all, what is the meaning?

You should not resist unduly. Many martial arts will not agree with this approach but it is not a matter of passively executing the techniques. It is a matter of cooperation, and by working with a partner you will learn to gauge how much pressure (and resistance) to apply. This is effective training.

Here is an illustration of how effective Aikido training can be. The wrestler Ichiro Yata once visited our dojo. Yata, who had been a competitor in the 1932 Los Angeles Olympics and served as chairman of the Ali-Japan Amateur Wrestling Association, was in good shape and an experienced wrestler, but he was completely stymied when the Aikido nikyo pin was applied to his wrist. Since he had no Aikido training, he was unable to resist despite all of his physical conditioning. Aikido looks easy but once you begin training you realize how much forging is necessary to build a powerful technique.

If you believe that harmonizing your movements with your partner has no value in an actual situation, and that by resisting you make the technique more realistic, you are overlooking the essential characteristic of Aikido.