

Aikidosphere

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Aikido Questions and Answers - Part 2

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Editor's Note: This discussion appears in the Best Aikido: The Fundamentals . We thank Doshu Moriteru Ueshiba for giving us permission to reprint it. Photos courtesy Aikikai Foundation.



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.

About how many techniques are there in Aikido?

At present in the Headquarters Dojo there are about fifty fundamental and basic techniques. However, once these basic movements are mastered and the principles of Aikido understood, the number of various applications is limitless. Aikido techniques are not learned externally by merely copying the movements. Just as it is impossible to fit everyone into the same mold, techniques emerge freely from within the wide-ranging Aiki movements.

What is the difference between "fundamental techniques" and "basic techniques"?

The fundamental techniques are primary. If we draw a parallel with mathematics, the fundamental techniques would be akin to the Five Principles of Euclid. Those fundamental principles are the basis of applied geometry. Since the fundamental techniques are like maxims, there are no movements in Aikido that violate those principles. Basic techniques are those techniques deduced from the fundamental techniques, and during training the proof of the maxims is clearly demonstrated.

There are those who like to make up their own maxims, but this is not possible in Budo. All the movements have to follow natural principles, and cannot be artificially constructed.

Here is an example: If you drop a stone it will fall to earth because of gravity, and that principle can never be challenged. It is a maxim that must be observed, and once that is understood as a base it can be utilized. From that fundamental maxim, the basic movements emerge, and from the basic movements variations spring forth.



Isn't it a problem to remember so many techniques?

There are those who want to memorize every technique from the start, or have everything explained to them first before they try it. If you think like that, however, it will be very difficult to learn by following the natural flow of Aikido movements, and unifying body and mind. Excessive thinking will impede your progress. When someone says, "I cannot remember the techniques I have been taught. What should I do?" the reply is, "It is all right to forget. It is important to forget about your head, and learn directly from your body."

Are there different schools of Aikido?

To be sure, there are many systems that claim to be "such-and-such Aikido," even without really knowing what Aikido is. And there are some splinter groups that have been established by former students of the Founder, with a few even going so far as to introduce organized competition, something that is totally contrary to the spirit of Aikido. Regardless of how similar the techniques appear, if they are divorced from the spirit of the Founder it is not Aikido.

We do not like to think that there are separate schools of Aikido. If we draw too many distinctions between different interpretations of the techniques, the universal character of Aikido will be degraded.

What is the purpose: of such preliminary practices as fuitama and torifune-undo?

Those practices are forms of misogi, a traditional Shinto ritual for purifying the spirit and body, The Founder was; deeply interested in esoteric Shinto, especially kototama , the science of sacred sounds, and he also studied misogi under the Shinto shaman Bonji Kawazura (1862-1929). The Founder engaged in such esoteric practices both before and after World War II, and some of his disciples emulated his example.

To put it simply, misogi is a method of purifying the body and spirit. It is hard to see how such simple movements can transform one's character, but if one practices the misogi ritual sincerely, it will undoubtedly have an effect.

What is the Aikido approach to etiquette?

Etiquette is a human creation, and it is found nowhere else in the animal kingdom. The notion of what is "proper" etiquette varies greatly from culture to culture, and it is impossible to state that one particular standard of behavior is the correct one. The Aikido approach is to let a sense of etiquette develop naturally, through regular training, and there are no elaborate rules of etiquette at the Headquarters Dojo.

Here is an example: children training at an Aikido dojo in Hawaii were never told to put their shoes in order before stepping onto the mat. However, after a few months, even the messiest of the children were arranging their shoes neatly, something that greatly surprised (and pleased) their parents. The children naturally came to realize the importance of etiquette without being told by the instructor.

Any kind of etiquette that has to be rigidly enforced, is not true

etiquette. "Budo training begins and ends with respect" is a common saying but even this does not have to be expressly stated. In Aikido, the best etiquette is the one that is most natural.

What is the most important relationship between Aikido training and everyday life?

One must, for example, maintain good Aikido posture and movement throughout the day. More important, however, is to maintain a modest attitude, and harmonize mind and body. In the realm of human relationships, one must avoid conflict and resolve problems in a harmonious Aikido fashion. In order to do this well, one must above all be modest and humble.