

Inner Peace: Aikido is a peaceful philosophy to live by

By Charles "Al" Huth

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I am a person who never studied or practiced any form of the martial arts. However, I have been intrigued by the foundational philosophy of aikido. The purpose of studying aikido is not perfection of a martial arts' skill, but rather the improvement of one's character. The goal of aikido is not necessarily to protect yourself or to hurt an attacker, but to contribute to making of a better society through the training of body, mind and spirit as one entity.

Aikido means "the way of harmony." The Eastern philosophical concept of "ki" refers to the creative universal principle of life. It is also referred to as the life force or breath (energy). We can break down the word "aikido" into syllables with the meaning of each: ai = harmony/connection, ki = spirit/energy, do = way/path. The strength of aikido is not in muscular force, but in flexibility, control and modesty. This training is the education and refinement of the spirit. This transformation takes place not only to physically defend oneself, but in all aspects of one's life. There is the idea that resisting brute force in all areas of one's life is counterproductive; however, we do have the ability to redirect harmful energy that comes our way, thus creating a better outcome for everyone concerned.

For those of us who are immersed in Western culture and are not practitioners of the martial arts, the core philosophy of aikido can be another valid way to live in harmony with ourselves and others, including our environment. We cannot always control things that come our way; however, we can decide how to respond. I see this as a matter of developing one's personal integrity, or to rephrase it more broadly, one's structural integrity. In our culture, the word integrity is commonly linked to morality. Morality refers to conformity to ideals of right human conduct, which means different things to different people. I use the term "structural integrity" as a personal construct for the necessity of all

aspects of one's life to be in harmony with each other. A house divided cannot stand. When the body, mind and passions of the soul are integrated, we can experience life as a co-creator with the universe — simply because we are part of this creative universe. As a conscious co-creator, we can stimulate an intimate, creative and interactive energy to enhance the vitality of life itself.

We cannot control the strong winds that come our way, yet we know that wind is useful to the functioning of our planet. Wind can also be used to generate electricity or power a sailboat. When one is conflicted with another, staunch resistance may not be the best course of action. Resistance often stimulates more resistance, which is a non-winnable event or stalemate. Humans have an innate desire to be heard and understood. There is a good possibility of having a conversation that leads to finding some commonality of beliefs simply by being focused on understanding the point of view of others. Often this good deed will be extended to you in return. First, listen to understand.

We cannot walk in the shoes of others. Their unique experiences can foster some automatic, unconscious responses. There are those who have the need to be right and will endlessly hang on to their position. Although we may not understand the developmental cause of this character trait, we can have empathy knowing that there is a reason for this character flaw. This can lessen our need to staunchly resist others. Our job is to creatively redirect this energy into something that has positive benefits for all concerned. When your best efforts appear to fail, know that there is still a possibility that these good efforts will be the catalyst for positive change in the future.

—Charles “Al” Huth, M.Ed., is the author of “Living an Extraordinary Life: Essentials for a Changing World” and “The Evolving Higher Self: A Directed Guide to Fulfillment.” He is also teaches a class at OLLIE/SOU, and is an inspirational speaker and magician. He lives in the Rogue Valley and encourages you to visit his website at JoyAl.org.



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