

Aikido Evolution: A Mind and Body Unification Perspective

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Not all Aikido, the Way of Harmony with Life's Energy, is the same. While all Aikido has its origins with Morihei Ueshiba, his students have taken the original art down distinctly different paths. Ueshiba's creation started as Aiki-budo, the Martial Way of Aiki. As Aikido continued to its growth, it was subject to changes and further development. Morihei Ueshiba trained in several arts which he then combined into Aiki-budo. Throughout his training, Ueshiba discussed Ki, Life's Energy, and made its use part of his art. The concept of Ki was understood as part of Japanese culture, and through its use he was able to perform techniques that always amazed his students. He continually worked to mature and develop them throughout his life. This fact can be seen in photographs taken throughout his life. One specific development is the "softening" of his techniques through the years. Shortly before his death, Ueshiba stated that he "must constantly train." Since his students were so enchanted with his techniques, Ueshiba (also called O'Sensei, the Great Teacher) may not have been able explain what he was actually doing. His abilities stemmed from an enlightenment and may have been too abstract or difficult to describe. This perspective comes from O'Sensei's story of his defeat of a Kendo master without having to fight because he was able to sense his opponent's attacks before they could land. Afterward, he went to the well to wash, he felt "a complete serenity of body and spirit"¹ that was like a golden light pouring down on him. This enlightenment would be difficult to describe, especially since it was a state of being that he was able to maintain. This can be seen in his Doka (poems of the Way), which were written from his training. Although they may seem very simple and straight forward, they contain hidden lessons. It may take an average student years to achieve enough enlightenment to find the hidden meaning.

After his death, people started to imitate O'Sensei's techniques and try to carry on what he had been teaching. At least, that was their objective. It was not necessarily accomplished! This is when Aikido really started to change, it began to develop factions. Some thought the techniques made the art, while others said it was strong Ki that mattered. These were not the only divisions. Another group felt that there needed to be a joining of mind and body within the system. At the forefront of this belief was Koichi Tohei. Tohei-sensei had been a student of O'Sensei's for many years and recognized these on-going changes in the art. He was particularly aware of how the concept of Ki was being lost. Ki had been an important part of his life and he held a strong belief that Ki had helped him immensely. During his training and life experiences, Tohei-sensei had discovered what became his four principles of mind and body unification. By incorporating these principles, working with Master Tempu Nakamura, and through experiences gained during World War Two that Tohei-sensei developed the four basic principles of mind and body unification long before he ever put them to pen. As stated by Tohei-sensei, the four basic principles of mind and body unification are:

- 1. Keep your One-Point**

This principle was developed from an adjustment of the Japanese saying "put your strength in your lower abdomen." Tohei found that putting strength in that spot was tiring and made him uneasy, but if he forgot about his lower abdomen fear could enter into his activities,

¹ Morihei Ueshiba, Budo page 14.

very dangerous during war. He adjusted the saying so that that he would concentrate on an infinitely small point in his lower abdomen which allowed him to find greater strength, both physically and mentally.

2. Relax Completely

After going through his first battle of World War Two, Tohei questioned that the universe (God) had in store for him. He found it hard to believe that the higher powers would have him training without a purpose. He decided to leave the answer up to the universe as to whether or not he would die. This decision allowed him to relax completely and concentrate on matters at hand. Tohei was able to remain calm even when an enemy attacked. Unfortunately, people are under the mistaken premise that to be relaxed is to be weak. This is completely incorrect since the opposite is true. When one becomes tense, not only can movement be hindered but the energy used tires the mind and body quickly.

3. Settle Down

By letting the weight of the body parts settle to their natural low point, less energy and effort is necessary to move the body and stress is relieved. When weight is settled down, or underside, the mind and body can move from a calm, relaxed place. This, then, is a strong position because there is no energy wasted on activities that may cause problems or become dangerous.

4. Extend Ki

This principle was actually discovered by Tohei-sensei as a child. He had been ill and was told not to speak loudly. However, when he spoke in a small voice, he found that he was pulling in his Ki which made him weaker. He continued to see that extending Ki was a benefit and even practiced it during wartime, stating that weak bullets can not hurt strong Ki. Preaching this to his men helped them all stay alive, in his opinion. Since Ki is the energy of the universe and all life comes from the universe, you can use this energy to promote strength and health.

Tohei-sensei lists these principles in this order, but in practice, if you can find one it will lead you to the others in a natural progression. The same is true for losing them. If you lose one, you lose all of them. Even though the first and fourth are principles of the mind and the second and third are principles of the body, they are all interconnected.

Tohei-sensei discovered that O'Sensei was practicing mind and body unification when he heard Master Tempu Nakamura's first lecture on the topic. O'Sensei was able to lead his opponent's mind first, then apply whatever technique presented itself because he was unified in mind and body through application of the four basic principles.

When Tohei-sensei noticed that Ki was disappearing from Aikido training after O'Sensei's death, he created a Ki development class based on the four

principles of mind and body unification. He approached the Aikido Headquarters with a suggestion for teaching Ki development. He was not given permission to teach this class within the headquarters, but was allowed to teach outside it.

After discussing what restrictions would be placed on the Ki development classes, Tohei-sensei gave birth to the Ki Society International (Ki No Kenlyukai). These classes grew quickly from their start in 1971 in both size and frequency. In 1974, the Aikido Headquarters had contacted all United States instructors and students to inform them that Tohei-sensei was no longer welcome at the dojos. When they removed his picture from the dojo walls, Tohei-sensei made his final decision and left the Aikido Headquarters, after devoting his life to its growth, and with nothing to show for it. Shortly after his split, Tohei-sensei founded Shin Shin Toitsu Aikido, Aikido based on the principles of mind and body unification. This is not the end of Aikido's evolution, however! Tohei-sensei began to introduce the principles of mind and body unification into daily life in addition to Aikido technique. The study of the principles greatly enhanced the personal growth and technical advancement of his students, but Tohei-sensei knew it held even greater potential.

Roderick Kobayashi also wondered about incorporating Aikido principles into daily life. Becoming possibly Tohei-sensei's best student, Kobayashi split away from his master in an attempt to develop further. The split was ten years in the making while Kobayashi developed and refined Seidokan Aikido. Seidokan's major focus is following the principles of Aikido (Circularity, Oneness, Appropriate Use of Ki, Control the First Move, and True Victory is Victory Over Oneself) as well as the four basic principles of mind and body unification, not only for Aikido but in daily life as well, a natural progression from O'Sensei's beginnings. O'Sensei was always searching for the "Inner Truth of Budo" but was never satisfied, even though he studied many different martial arts. He came to realize that "Aiki," oneness with nature, was the answer to his search for "True Budo." The name Seidokan uses "Sei" (also seen as Makoto) from one of O'Sensei's doka which translates as "earnestly keep polishing the fundamentals and seek the truth of oneness of the universe."² Kobayashi draws parallels between Aikido and daily life to allow students to more clearly see the benefits of applying Aikido principles to daily living. This has not been the only change Kobayashi has wrought. Techniques have been refined to become more simple and effective when applied through the principles. These changes have not been for the sake of change, rather as the world changes, so must the systems within it. This evolutionary track is heading for a day when the principles of Seidokan Aikido will be applied throughout the day for de-escalating conflict, moving toward a more harmonious community.

Today there is more emphasis on becoming less violent as a society. While the experts state that there should be less violence though they rarely give alternatives to employ when solving conflicts. Problem-solving is very important in the business world but seems to get lost in the interpersonal world. This is where Kobayashi has continued to develop Aikido and its principles. The Seidokan Institute has been developed to instruct people who wish to learn the principles of Seidokan Aikido without the self-defense techniques for use in their daily lives. Soon it would not be surprising if Aikido principles as well as mind and body

² Roderick Kobayashi, Aikido Doka: Poems of Morihei Ueshiba page 8.

unification principles are more fully utilized in the corporate world, as are other principles with their origins in Budo, the Martial Way, (i.e. The Book of Five Rings by Miyamoto Musashi).

The martial arts have the principles to greatly advance personal development when they are taught sincerely and followed honestly. Yet, as the world grows and evolves, people who effect changes within the martial arts often become outcasts within the martial arts community. Understand that this is not condoning a break with an organization for the politics of personal greed or wealth. When a person develops and evolves as art for the benefit of the students, change is good and should be done. All too often people make a break and change for reasons that do not follow the principles that they are trying to teach to their students. The basic principles taught and promoted within schools and organizations should be applied personally to daily life. Since not everyone in the world is the same, there should be more tolerance for those making changes for their own personal growth and for the possible benefits that the art will receive from the evolution. Keep a little skepticism, though, for those who are just out for themselves. Politics and ego-stroking have no place in the martial arts, particularly when self-control and victory over oneself is taught and promoted. There are too many similarities between martial arts both in theory and in principle to allow politics and greed to cause unnecessary division and discord. It's even worse when schools of the same style are intolerant of each other. Aikido should be Aikido with people following the direction they wish to go within the principles. This should hold true for all martial arts! Burned bridges are often very difficult to rebuild, so make sure you practice what you teach.