



The Effect of Aikido on the Individual

A personal view

By

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Introduction

As each individual internalises the world differently, I will make it clear from the start, that I am choosing to use the term Individual in the context of myself, as this really is the only person I can speak for with any authority.

I may be able to assume that other individuals may see Aikido in the same light as myself, but I would use the analogy of Aikido being a Gem Stone with many facets. Because of my background and current understanding of the Art, I have seen some of the many facets of the jewel. I realise that other facets exist and that other practitioners find their particular facet the most important for them, but it is important to understand that each view is purely that, one view at one point in time, which in it's own right is of no more importance than any other view of the complete jewel that is Aikido. It is the continued search for an understanding of all facets that makes Aikido a Way.

The Way of Harmony

What is Harmony? Is it peace and light to all men at all times? Turn the other cheek? Or an Eye for an Eye ?

The word Harmony is in itself a very emotive word. Because of this, it is almost as difficult as describing the colour green, we all know what it is, but perhaps we have our own flavour. I believe that one of the first steps in understanding Aikido is to define what Harmony means to you. For me :-

Harmony is the maintenance of a satisfactory relationship, at a particular point in time, within a system.

To explain further, within the context of Aikido, the *System* in question would be Tori and Uke.

1. Before an attack is launched, a state of harmony exists, whereby both Tori and Uke are satisfied with the relationship between them.
2. At some point in time, the harmony breaks down whereby an attack is initiated. The satisfactory relationship has now gone, as Tori is under threat.



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3. Tori now uses the principles of Aikido to bring the system back to a state of harmony. i.e. the correct level of reasonable force to nullify the attack and return to the satisfactory relationship. This “reasonable force” could range from simply moving out of the way in order to keep a satisfactory fighting distance, to executing a technique that immobilises or incapacitates Uke either temporarily or permanently. Ideally, the outcome should be one in which both Tori and Uke are happy, with both emerging unscathed, but there may be unavoidable exceptions.

Martial Arts Practice vs Training

Aikido differs from any of the other martial arts that I have experienced, from the very first session. You *Practice Aikido*, you *Train at Karate* etc.

Karate Training

Karate Training can be made a very personal thing, something that can be achieved and performed without relationship to another. E.g. train to punch harder, kick faster, block harder etc. This fits with the way that percussive martial arts are very often taught and therefore internalised by the Karateka. As long as you can move faster and hit harder than your opponent, then this will ensure that you come off best.

The attainment of individual perfection of movement is also evident by the importance of Kata within most, if not all, forms of Karate. The pre-arranged set of moves are there to be perfected and can also be used to judge a Karateka within the realms of competition.

A Karateka will actually try to cultivate a spirit that is not affected by the opponent. The focused aggression of the techniques, with full kiai and Kime, must be performed almost irrespectively of your opponent. If you believe that you are weaker or slower than your opponent, you very probably will be.

It is for this reason that Tamashiwari (breaking techniques) is sometimes used in demonstrations, to show that the Karateka is not influenced by a seemingly difficult breaking task. It is not understood by a lot of Karateka that Tamashiwari also demonstrates to the practitioner the amount of damage they can do with a single technique and hence should use restraint in the use of those techniques.

The Practice of Aikido

Aikido Practice is approached from a completely different perspective. The practice session is normally conducted in more relaxed and non-competitive atmosphere. The cultivation of this atmosphere by the instructor, helps produce in the Aikidoka feelings of security, confidence, relaxation and non-aggression.



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It is through the practice in the above state of mind, that the Aikidoka becomes aware that the techniques should not be performed *On Uke* but *With Uke* and also that the effect created on Uke's posture is a function of Tori's Technique in relation to Uke's attack.

It is only when all thoughts of conflict are removed from Tori's mind, that Tori can hope to co-ordinate with the speed and direction of an initial attack, then redirect Uke's force before applying a technique in the most efficient manner using the least amount of force to achieve the maximum effect.

For me, even when static demonstrations such as un-bendable arm or the lifting exercise are performed, these are more to do with changing Uke's perception of how heavy Tori is, or the strength of the arm. Again, the effect on Uke, this time on their perception of reality, as well as physically, is what is important. The principles of understanding postures and absorbing what a person is giving, are also developed in these exercises. Trying not to be lifted or trying not to let the arm bend in a competitive frame of mind, normally has the opposite effect.

The effective use of Aikido will come from Tori's understanding and application of fundamental principles, not simply the performance of technically perfect movements.

The fundamental principles such as absorption, Tai-sabaki, redirection, co-ordination, natural body power, un-bendable arm, non-aggression, correct fighting distance, moving to a position of safety, control of Uke's posture, control of one's own posture, effective and correct use of force, to name a few – should be given more importance than the mechanical aspects of each technique.

I would go so far as to say that, if these principles are applied, then this is Aikido, whether or not a recognisable technique occurs, you will be in harmony with Uke.



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Aikido In Daily Life

Past experiences condition each of us to act or react in certain ways.

Sometimes, violence, aggression or conflict, used in prior circumstances for whatever reason, be that in a Dojo or on the street, can be the conditioned response to a problem that could or should be solved in another manner.

Put another way, if the only tool you have is a hammer, then every problem tends to look like a nail.

The correct practice of Aikido shows that each time an attack is launched, the response *has* to be different. For each attack, Uke will not be moving in the same way at the same time, they will not have their posture in a certain position, their intention may be different, etc. etc. To be in co-ordination with and to understand the relevance of all of this is to be in harmony with Uke.

Aikido **will** affect a person's perception of the world, probably without the individual even being aware that changes are occurring.

The understanding that each event, although similar to something that has happened before, should be treated on its own merits as a new experience, is a truly worthwhile lesson.

Through the study of Aikido and my definition of Harmony as: -

The maintenance of a satisfactory relationship, at a particular point in time, within a system.

has lead me to understand that: -

The "system" may be a marriage or a friendship or a business.

The "satisfactory relationship" may be the love between two people, or a working relationship.

In order to "maintain" the "relationship" within the "system", actions may need to be taken or even stop being taken, to restore the Harmony when one notices a change or potential change in the "relationship".

Simple, everyday things, such as shaking a persons hand have changed for me. I have seen on many occasions when a grip used by a person in a position of supposed seniority has literally crushed a business acquaintance's hand and on one occasion, when neither party would let go before the other. This "vice like grip" concept is purely to do with adopting a posture irrespective of another, almost as an attempt to impose a persons will on the other. Just the simple act of shaking hands in a way that it is in harmony with the other, leaves me



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feeling that there is now more of a chance of mutual respect than if either of us were left nursing a bruised hand. I now feel comfortable in allowing another to feel superior by deliberately weakening my grip in the knowledge that this really is not important. It is the outcome of the discussions that follow that is of real importance and I now have an insight into what makes this person tick.

When having discussions with others, particularly in a business environment, I feel that I pay more attention to the other person's point of view and *how* they are saying what they are, than I used to. If you adopt an unmoveable posture, then any flaws in your arguments can be more easily spotted or you give the impression of just being unreasonable. By trying to understand *why* someone is using a particular approach, it is much easier to construct your argument in a way that will be more agreeable to them. Once this approach is taken, it makes the chance of confrontation less.

On a more physical level, I am now more relaxed being in close proximity to others. I now find riding on the Underground more amusing than imposing. It is probably because I am now more comfortable with someone being in my personal space and I can simply let others be where they want to be, without the subconscious thought of requiring a specific area of my own.

Each time I attend an Aikido class, either teaching or studying, I learn something. I normally learn how little I know and how much more there is yet to understand. This means that there cannot be an end to the study of Aikido as long as my mind stays open.

There is no right or wrong way of performing a technique, only a way that works at that point in time with this Uke. When a technique does not work, it should be a humbling experience to realise that it is you, not Uke who is at fault. There is definitely no right or wrong way of attacking, only Tori's inability to deal with the current situation. Even if you believe that Uke is anticipating and stopping your technique, either let them go or do something else.

From very early on in the practice of Aikido I realised that I had found a true Martial Art in every sense. In order to practice successfully, it had to be on 2 levels. Firstly as an art form, where ones understanding of the principles of Aikido are expressed in the form of a technique which is executed in co-ordination or harmony with the force of the aggressor. Secondly as a martial art, where the same principles of awareness, fighting distance and focused power as found in other Martial Arts can be used to devastating effect. The main advantage I could see though, was that Aikido techniques could be used with different levels of power and hence cause varying degrees of effect. It is virtually impossible in karate to punch someone softly or kick them a little.

In my opinion, Aikido, as I wish to practice it, starts where other martial arts are aiming. Some other Martial Arts start as a good form of self-defence and through many years of study can be developed into an art form. Aikido however starts off as an art form and then in time becomes an effective form of self-defence. Aikido has to be discovered, not copied



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parrot fashion. Aikido can be hard and it can be soft. Aikido teaches that there are always options.

Aikido shows that the age-old question of how to deal with someone who is being unreasonable can be answered. Either give ground, stand your ground, occupy their ground - or if all else fails – get in a round and buy everyone a drink.