

A short story of Ueshiba Morihei
And his philosophy of life
'Aikido'

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This short essay is supposed to give the practitioner of Aikido an idea of the person behind Aikido and how Aikido was created both physically and mentally. If you have any questions or comments after reading this essay, contact me on following mail address: kimmortensen@stofanet.dk

INTRODUCTION

This essay is about a man called Ueshiba Morihei, nicknamed O-sensei, and his philosophy of life; Aikido.

When I first heard about Ueshiba Morihei I heard stories, which were so amazing that I thought they belonged in another age and not in this century.

They were stories about a man who was able to disappear suddenly when he was attacked; something which one would expect to find in fairytales and old myths. I began to wonder who this man was and why he has been elevated into some kind of a God; there had to be an ordinary story behind the man Ueshiba Morihei.

The first part of this essay will describe Ueshiba Morihei's Biography. The second half will concern his philosophy of life,

and what makes it so unique. In the biography part I will call Ueshiba Morihei by name whereas in the part on his philosophy and religion I will call him O-sensei as it was his religion and philosophy which gave him that nickname. I choose to do this because the biography part concerns a man and his achievements through his life.

The second part concerns Ueshiba Morihei as a philosopher and a teacher and therefore it is more suitable to call him O-sensei in this part. The essay will give an overall look on the history of Ueshiba Morihei, focused on the events in his life which were the most important for creating his philosophy.

A Biography of Ueshiba Morihei.

Ueshiba Morihei was born on Dec. 14, 1883, the fourth child and only son among five children. He lived on a farm with his parents Yoroku and Yuki, in an area of Wakayama Prefecture, Tanabe. His father was a respected member of the local community and had been a member of the village council for 20 years.

At the age of 8 Ueshiba Morihei began studying under the direction of a Shingon priest (Shingon is a Buddhist sect) who taught him about the Chinese Confucian classics. However, Ueshiba Morihei was more interested in and fascinated by the esoteric Buddhist rites. He began daydreaming about becoming a Buddhist priest one day.

As an antidote to the constant reading and daydreaming Ueshiba Yoroku encouraged his son to take up swimming and Sumo- wrestling. This was Ueshiba Morihei's first contact with physical training.

Ueshiba Morihei graduated from Tanabe higher elementary school, and was admitted to the newly established Tanabe prefectural middle school. He left the school without graduating, and instead went to the Yoshida Abacus Institute. After getting his diploma he was employed at the Tanabe Tax office. In 1902 he resigned from his job, as he was obliged to administer a new tax law against farmers and fishermen, a law which he felt was grossly unfair. Instead he became the leader of a protest movement against this law.

The same year, 1902, Ueshiba Morihei went to Tokyo to become a businessman and founded a supply store, Ueshiba trading. More importantly, it was during this stay in Tokyo that Ueshiba Morihei began studying traditional JuJutsu and KenJutsu, some of the arts which should be a foundation of his own philosophy of life, Aikido, years later. Later the same year Ueshiba Morihei was forced to leave Tokyo and return to Tanabe, as he had developed beriberi. (Beriberi is a tropical disease caused by lack of B-vitamin)

Soon after his return he married Itokawa Hatsu, a girl he had known since his childhood.

The political atmosphere between Japan and Russia had become increasingly colder ever since the Sino-Japanese war ended in 1895¹, and a war between Japan and Russia seemed inevitable. In 1903 Ueshiba Morihei decided to join the army, and he enlisted in the 37th regiment of the fourth division in Osaka. When the Russo-Japanese war broke out Ueshiba Morihei was sent to the front in Manchuria as a corporal. He returned to Japan as a sergeant, promoted for his bravery in the field. According to a myth about Ueshiba Morihei; "...he could sense when a bullet was coming his way, even before it was fired..." (AWR. p. 4). One among many myths about Ueshiba Morihei. Although his commanding officer recommended him to the National Military Academy, he resigned from active duty in the army. Ueshiba Morihei then returned to Tanabe where he worked on the family farm, and participated in village politics. During this period Ueshiba Yoroku made his barn into a Dojo, (training place), and engaged Takagi Kiyochi, who was a skillful 9th dan Judo instructor, to teach his son the Kodokan style of Judo². At the same time Ueshiba Morihei attended Masakatsu Nakais Dojo where he learned the Goto school of Yagyuryu JuJutsu.³ He remained in Tanabe for 3 years.

It was now the year 1910, the year Ueshiba Morihei and his wife had their first child, and the year when he heard about government plans of settling the northern island of Hokkaido. The thought of making something out of nothing appealed to Ueshiba Morihei, and as there were many unemployed farmers and fishermen in the village, he called a town meeting, to recruit volunteers. More than eighty people agreed to emigrate, and in March 1912 they left Tanabe to arrive at their destination, Shirataki. Ueshiba. Morihei

¹ The Sino-Japanese war ended with the treaty of Shimonoseki of April 17, 1895. Russia, France and Germany banded together to force Japan to give up the Liaotung Peninsula to China. However, 3 years later the same countries took new slices of China, the Russians taking Liaotung Peninsula for themselves. The Japanese had to swallow this humiliation, but in 1902 an Anglo-Japanese alliance gave them confidence, and the stage was now set for a confrontation between Russia and Japan. (The Anglo-Japanese alliance was the first alliance between a western and non-western country) Reichauer: Japan the story of a nation p. 147-148.

² Kodokan Judo, the original form of Judo, founded in 1882 by Jigoro Kano (1860-1938). Michael Random: The martial arts p. 234.

³ Yagyuryu JuJutsu, founded by Yagyu Muneyoshi (1527-1606) Michael Random: The martial arts p. 282.

stayed in Shirataki with his family for seven years and was respectfully known as "the King of Shirataki". The most significant event which happened to Ueshiba Morihei whilst staying on Hokkaido, was when he met Takeda Sokaku, grandmaster of Daitoryu Aiki-Jutsu⁴, perhaps the most important martial art of those from which Ueshiba Morihei developed his own style.

In the Spring of 1919 Ueshiba Morihei's father became seriously ill, and the 36 year old Morihei had to leave Hokkaido. On his way to Tanabe he heard that the leader of the flourishing new religion Omoto-kyo⁵, Onisaburo Deguchi was living in Ayabe. Being very religious, Ueshiba Morihei decided to stop at Ayabe to pray for his father's health. He met Onisaburo Deguchi, who told him that his father would be better off where he was going. When Ueshiba Morihei came to Tanabe his father had passed away.

After a period of mourning and emotional instability he decided to move to Ayabe and live a more spiritual life under the guidance of Onisaburo Deguchi. The year was 1920, the most trying for Ueshiba Morihei; within one year his father died and his three-year-old son Takamori and his one-year-old son Kuniji died of a virus. (He had a son in 1921, Ueshiba Kisshomaru, who later continued his father's teaching of Aikido).

He lived in Ayabe with his family for 8 years. During that time he built his first Dojo, Ueshiba Academy, where he taught Daito-ryu Aiki-Jutsu. In this period Ueshiba Morihei's martial art teaching began to take a more spiritual character, which resulted in a break away from the conventions in Yagyu-ryu JuJutsu and Daito-ryu Aiki-Jutsu. In search of the true Budo he took an original approach adding religious principles and techniques, trying to break down the barriers between Body, Mind and Spirit. This was what he in 1922 called Aiki-Bujutsu.

During the twenties the Omoto-kyo sect experienced many conflicts, mainly because of Onisaburo's unorthodox behavior. On February the 11th, 1921 he was arrested for lese majeste, as he said that he was the savior of the world, and should be declared emperor and run the government. This was known as the Omoto incident. In 1924 he had the idea of making "a heavenly kingdom on Earth" in Mongolia with several syncretic Chinese and Korean religious groups. Among others, Ueshiba Morihei joined the group which was to go to China and create the "new Jerusalem". However, the journey was a failure from the beginning. When they reached their destination Chinese troops waited to arrest them. Morihei, Onisaburo and four others were sentenced to death. Fortunately a Japanese consul intervened just before their execution and secured their release and return to Japan. Ueshiba Morihei returned to Ayabe to his former life, teaching martial arts and farming. While continuing to train sword techniques and JuJutsu. He began to become interested in SoJutsu (spear techniques), which later shown in Morihei's handling of weapons in his Aikido techniques. However, things were not the same after the trip to Mongolia; Ueshiba Morihei had been deeply affected by the experience of facing death so closely. After

⁴ Daitoryu Aiki-Jutsu was founded approx. 1100 AD by Minamoto Yoshimitsu sixth generation descendant of the Emperor Seiwa. The art was secretly transmitted among family members from generation to generation. In 1574, Takeda Kunitsugu moved to Aizu (Fukushima Prefecture) where the techniques of Daitoryu Aiki-Jutsu were taught exclusively to high ranking Samurai of the Aizu-han in the following 300 years. The Aizu Samurai were diehard supporters of the old military regime and fiercely resisted the new Meiji government, being among the last to capitulate in 1868. In 1898 Takeda Sokaku decided that the Daitoryu Aiki-Jutsu should be open for everyone, as "The Way of the Sword was over". John Stevens: Aikido the Way of Harmony pp. 5-7.

⁵ Omoto-kyo was a mixture of Shinto Mythology, Shamanism, faith- healing and personality cult. At the height of its popularity it had over 2 million adherents. There is no exact date for the foundation, but it was in the late 18th century.

returning to Japan, he frequently felt a manifestation of a spiritual force. In 1925 a naval officer and master of Kendo challenged him, but Ueshiba Morihei defeated him without fighting. The story tells that he could sense where the Shinai (bamboo sword used for Kendo) would strike before the naval officer made a move. After this 'fight' he went into the garden to wash by the well, and there he experienced a complete serenity of Body and Spirit. He experienced the unity of the Universe and the Self, and he became aware of philosophical principles on which Aikido later was based, principles which I will get back to later in this essay. After this event he changed the name Aiki-Bujutsu to Aiki-Budo; from the Martial art of Aiki to the Martial Way of Aiki.

In 1925 Ueshiba Morihei and his art were beginning to become well known in Japan, and Morihei was invited to Tokyo to teach at the Naval Academy by Admiral Takeshita Isamu. During the same visit he was asked to teach at the Imperial court and the Imperial Household Ministry. They were all amazed by Ueshiba Moriheis way of Martial art, and invited him to Tokyo several times during the following two years. In February 1927, Morihei was invited to Tokyo again, and this time he decided to leave Ayabe, and devote all his energy to establish himself in Tokyo as a teacher of Martial arts. In 1930 Jigoro Kano, the founder of Judo, came to see who this master was. Kano was very impressed and said that this was the ideal Budo, not knowing that it was his own system that had started Ueshiba Moriheis search many years ago. The next few years were extremely busy for Ueshiba Morihei; everybody wanted to be at his classes. He taught naval officers, military officers, at the Police Academy and at several Aiki-Budo Dojos around Tokyo and Osaka. When WW II broke out one student after the other left Ueshiba Morihei to go to the front. Furthermore because Morihei only wanted to teach specially chosen pupils at that time, and several of them were leaders of the military. He was encouraged to be an officer in the army, but he declined that offer.

In 1942 as the war was intensifying Ueshiba Morihei moved with his wife to Iwama, Ibaraki Prefecture. He left Tokyo because he did not believe that Japan could ever win this war, and he was certain that Tokyo would be the target of every attack on Japan. He was furious that the very people to whom he had tried to teach the love and peace of Budo were now reckless people who would kill anyone. As he himself said: "*A bunch of fools, they trout about displaying their violence, their narrow-mindedness, and wanton destruction of life. What idiots to go against nature, against the will of Kami! (God)*"(ARN. p. 29).

In Iwama, Morihei began the construction of an Aiki shrine and an outdoor Dojo. The work was finished in 1944. During the construction of the shrine he cleared an area for farming, as he was of the opinion that true Budo and farming went together; the growing of the Spirit and the cultivation of the land should be the same. It was during this time that Ueshiba Morihei changed the name Aiki-Budo to Aikido. The Way of harmony and spirit.

As an effect of the War Morihei decided that Aikido should be spread out allover the world, and not just for a few distinguished people. On November 22, 1945 the World Aikikai foundation was established, headed by Moriheis son Ueshiba Kisshomaru.

After the War martial arts had a rough time in Japan. The American Occupants prohibited all teaching. However, because of its emphasis on peace and seeking for spiritual truth, Aikido was allowed to continue its active part in society, even some of the American Occupants were amazed by the art, and began to train during their stay in Japan. For almost ten years Morihei had stayed in Iwama, but in the fifties the seventy year old Morihei began to travel around Japan to give demonstrations in his art, to try to make Aikido known to as many as possible. During the last 19 years of Ueshiba Moriheis life he

continued to give demonstrations and teach classes until his death April the 26th 1969, eighty-six years old. Ueshiba Kisshomaru continued to spread Aikido and today nearly 200 universities in Japan have Aikido clubs, as do a large number of Japanese firms and factories. Aikido is today a growing Martial art with over 50 countries in its Federation.

"Winning and losing, is not true Budo. True Budo knows no defeat.
Never defeated means never fighting".

Ueshiba Morihei

(Ueshiba Kisshomaru, Aikido p. 178)

Harmony of Body, Mind and Spirit.

Aikido is a modernization of ancient Japanese Martial arts. That does not mean that it is similar to the old arts. In the old times people had to fight on a battlefield and survive; they needed good fighting abilities, and that is how the Martial art tradition began.

In the Tokugawa period (1603-1868) these Martial arts became Budo, a spiritual Way of Martial arts; but the kind of Budo they executed in those days would not fit into a modern society as Japan had become after 1868, Meiji Restoration. Still, those arts need to be fully appreciated as they are the foundation of every modern Martial art. O-sensei (Ueshiba Morihei), did not want to make an anachronism, but instead use the spiritual ways and develop movements from the old arts. (SA p.14) It was his aim to combine Body, Mind and Spirit, as one with the universal power or energy "KI". ("KI", a concept which I will describe later). with years of studying different religious philosophies, and different ancient Martial arts, he created a new religion, a new Way of life for this century. It was a nondestructive Martial art, with harmony as the main goal, and he called this art Aikido.

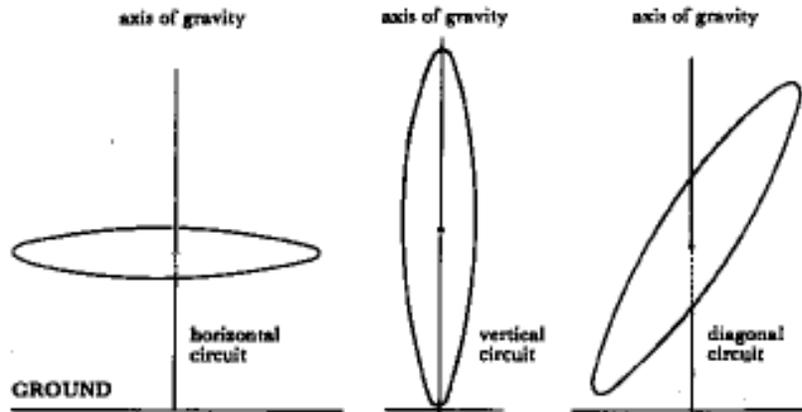
The philosophy of the Circle:

In the beginning Aikido was not born with the thought of making a new philosophy or a new religion. It was born with an idea of a new way of self defense, a method of controlling the strength of a physically stronger opponent. Control is a keyword in Aikido, as it is an art that tries to overcome an opponent without resorting to foolhardy violence like most other Martial arts.

Ordinary Japanese Martial arts have basic movements, like moving from side to side, forwards and backwards. Aikido differs from these arts by using spherical rotation as the basic movement. When looked upon by a non-practitioner it seems almost like dancing, and it is hard to believe that it is an art of self defense. However, unlike for example Karate, Aikido is a highly sophisticated Martial art, as the system provides one with a possibility of defending oneself without injuring the opponent. Whereas in Karate an opponent will be severely injured. If an opponent is getting injured by an Aikidoka (person studying Aikido) it is due to the level of the Aikidoka. A Master would never have to injure an opponent, not even if there are twenty opponents, all due to the spherical rotation (SA p. 36-42). The idea of the spherical rotation is to maintain balance and achieve a firm Center. This means that one moves in a circular motion, catching the energy from an attack and guiding it into a spherical rotation and thereby becoming a stable axis of movement. While doing this the

opponent loses his center and his power, as the power only exists in the center. It is just like the quiet center of a spinning top. The calm center of the top makes the spin smooth and rapid, but if it loses the center it will become unbalanced and out of control (SA p. 34-38). Around the center there are an innumerable number of circles flowing among each other, both back and forth. In the physical action of Aikido, these circles can be divided into three groups. Horizontal, Vertical and Diagonal.

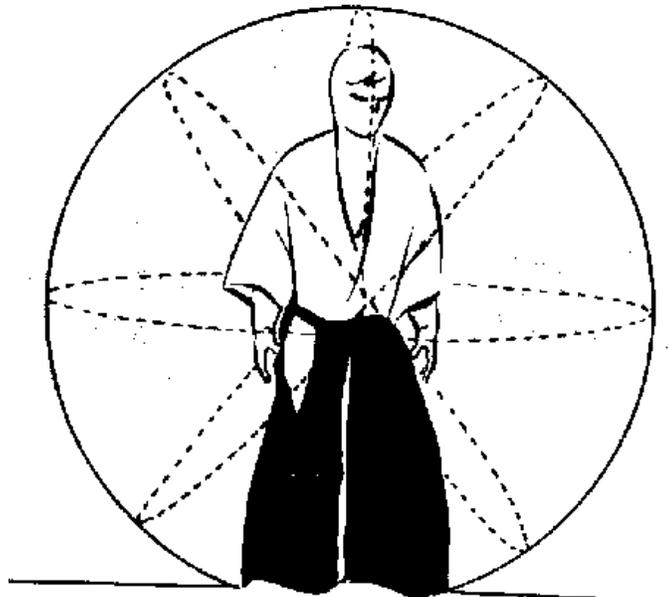
Fig.1.



(Aikido and the dynamic sphere Westbrook & Ratti. p. 96)

These roughly categorized groups give the Aikidoka an unlimited range of action, called 'the dynamic sphere'. Any attack can be absorbed in one of these circles and neutralized, as the energy in the circles moves an opponents center around the center of the aikidoka (DS. P. 93-103).

Fig. 2



(Aikido and the dynamic sphere Westbrook & Ratti. p. 100)

With the idea of a firm center whilst under a physical attack, and guiding this oncoming force into a spherical rotation, O-sensei realized that this was the way of Nature. There is no reason to work against the law of nature. Man is not that strong. If he is overwhelmed by a force stronger than himself he will be defeated if trying to compare strength. He has to harmonize his center with the center of the Universe to let all energies flow around him, as this is the only way he can be strong.

To unite the center with the center of the Universe it is very important never to let the mind stop. The mind stops when an attachment occurs, and an attachment occurs when the mind is focused on any object or any movement. In Japanese there is a term called *Jiyu Jizai*, meaning free and unrestricted. This term refers to a state where the mind is free and not fixated on any object. O-sensei talked about "Seeing" with the center and not with the eyes, as the center sees all movement and does not let the mind be captured by anything⁶(ZA p. 42).

Reaching this state of mind is not easy. Yet why it is so important in O-sensei's philosophy of life to reach this state of mind? My answer is that O-sensei studied a lot of Japanese religious philosophies, and he used fragments from each religion to make a religion which he thought was the right way of life. In this particular aspect O-sensei used his knowledge of Zen-Buddhism. In Zen-Buddhism there is a term called Immovable Wisdom. Immovable does not refer to any physical movement. Immovable Wisdom describes a mind which does not hesitate but moves totally free without any restrictions, and in all directions. The easiest way to describe and understand Immovable Wisdom is to explain about Senju Kannon. Senju Kannon is the Goddess of Mercy and a symbol of Immovable Wisdom. She has a thousand arms each holding different objects; a bow, a sword etc. If Senju Kannon focused on just one of the arms, the other 999 would be useless to her. She has the capability of letting her energies flow freely, and therefore she obviously has attained the state of Immovable Wisdom.

A typical aspect of human beings is that we easily focus on feelings. To attain Immovable Wisdom does not tell us to turn off our human aspects, but it tells us not to dwell on a single object, a single emotion. The objects, the emotions will always be a part of us and around us, and trying to ignore all things will create a mind focused on the ignorance and as said before; a focused mind cannot attain Immovable Wisdom (ZA p. 41-48).

O-sensei believed that a mind which is focused on single objects is a mind which easily focus on bad things. It is the creator of war, greed, selfishness and other things of destruction. On the other hand, a mind which moves freely will be harmonious with the circular movements of the Universe, and thereby the Self and all beings.

After WWII O-sensei decided that his philosophy of life should be attainable to everyone. He saw it as his mission of life to teach Aikido and spread it all over the world. He was convinced that if all human beings could learn about the philosophy of Aikido, they would learn about the Harmony of the Universe, and thereby create a harmonious World without War and Violence.

⁶ The theories of Immovable Wisdom and Martial art was not an invention of Ueshiba Morihei. The Zen-priest Takuan Soho (1574-1645) described Immovable Wisdom almost 400 years before O-sensei in his work "Unfettered Mind". A work which contains: *Fudochi Shinmyo Roku* (The mysterious record of Immovable Wisdom) *Taiaki* (Annals of the Sword Taia) *Reiroshu* (The clear sound of Bells). However O-sensei developed his own Martial art by using fragments from Takuan Soho's old theories.

KI the essence of Aikido:

In Japanese countless expressions contain the word KI. The weather is TENKI (spirit of the sky). Heat is HI NO KI (spirit of fire). If one is impatient or short tempered he has a short KI, TANKI. If one is ill he is BYOKI, his KI has a disease. These expressions have various meanings, but all include the idea of KI. The KI of Aikido is very difficult to translate into English as there is no precise equivalent word for it. If we look at the spiritual aspect of KI it would be translated as Spirit or Soul. If we look at the affective aspect of KI it would be Sense, Intuition or feeling. However, KI has a much broader meaning than a single or even a few words could convey. Equivalent of KI would be CHI in Chinese or Prana in India. The original idea of KI was for example; *'The essential principle of harmony'*, *'The source of creativity expressed in the form of Yin and Yang'*, *'The divine force that penetrates all things'*. These original conceptions of KI were introduced into Japan in the Nara period (710 - 794), originally coming from India through China. From the Nara period until the Tokugawa period the concept of KI changed dramatically, due to the rise of the Samurai class and the new virtues of life which the Samurai class brought with them. However, in the peaceful Tokugawa period, the principles of KI returned to the original ideas of Yin and Yang (SA p. 19-25).

In the philosophy of Aikido (and some other Martial arts) Ki is generated from the Hara. Hara is a point about two inches below the navel, Which corresponds to what we in the west call the center of gravity. KI is not merely a physical nor a mental power. However, it is a mental power which can produce concrete physical results.

In common western psychology it is recognized that mind and body enter a mutual relationship, although often spoken of as separate entities (Mind over Body). In Asian thinking the terms *'inner energy'* or *'Intrinsic energy'* are used when referring to KI, and the Mind and the Body are not regarded as separate entities.

In the philosophy of Aikido it is said that we are all born with KI, because without KI there is no life. A newborn baby does not know about the separation between Mind and Body, so the KI of a newborn baby is very strong. However, as we grow older we are influenced more and more by science and thoughts which make the gap between Mind and Body bigger, and our KI becomes less visible than it was at our birth (DS p. 21-24). Less visible does not mean that the KI has begun to disappear. It means that the KI is uncoordinated and dispersed.

The concept of KI can be expanded to include the cosmos and the ever expanding energy of life in the Universe as a whole, and then contracted to a consideration of the personality and vitality of an individual human being. O-sensei once said that Man has to harmonize his individual KI with the Universal KI to gain order and peace in the world and this should be realized by unifying Body – Mind – Spirit in the practise of Aikido (SA. p. 23-25).

Martial art philosophy operates with two types of KI; the hard KI and the soft KI. Hard KI is used for cutting straight through a physical target, and is therefore a concentrated energy extended in a linear direction. It gives the image of a huge stone rolling down a mountain. Soft KI is a form of energy which does not cut through the target but sweeps it away in a tangential, circular motion. This gives the image of wind or water.

As Aikido is an art of not injuring the opponent, soft KI is the desired form. However, O-sensei did not call the KI in Aikido soft KI, he called it dynamic KI, as soft KI can also be static KI. Dynamic KI refers better to the spherical movements of Aikido.

As I wrote previously, KI exists in every human being, it just has to get concentrated and coordinated. In Aikido practice this is done through special exercises, among which abdominal breathing is the most important. This technique of deep breathing is the same found in the esoteric disciplines of Yoga and Zen. In Aikido- practice the technique of developing KI through breathing exercises is called KOKYU. Literally KOKYU means breathing. KO is inhalation and KYU is expiration (ADK p. 143-146, 207). Physically the technique is executed by inhaling through the nose, letting the air fill the lungs to their maximum. After this the air is pushed down into the lower abdomen (hara) and the expiration can slowly begin. In the practice of Aikido this is not just done in Seiza (Classic Martial art sitting posture), but also when each technique is executed. During a physical attack the opponent expires and the Aikidoka inhales, and during the execution of the technique the Aikidoka will expire; He is harmonizing his KOKYU with the KOKYU of the attacking person. In this way all energy: is absorbed from the attack. Even the flow of KI which is extended in the attack as "hard KI" is absorbed and used against the opponent. This absolute timing of movement is in Zen pictured as; "Swift as sparks from a flint", or "No space even for a single strand of hair" (ZA p. 87-88). In other words this mean, you should move your hands and legs in a flash in response to the movements of your opponent. If you are even slightly conscious of the movement you will not be able to move instantaneously. Instantaneously is a word which gives the illusion of moving very quickly, but it is not supposed to be understood in this way. In Aikido terms it means that ones KI does not stop even for an instant. If an Aikidoka is trying to execute a technique fast, his mind will be locked on the speed and he will lose his KI. He has to be totally open-minded to let his KI move freely. To be swift as sparks from a flint requires that a person has to be able to see with his center and not only with the eyes. Seeing with the eyes does not make a person able to see the movement of the opponents KI. In Aikido the movement of KI is regarded as the first strike from the opponent, and the physical strike, which is blown just after- wards is regarded as the second strike. O-sensei realized this during a fight with a naval officer in 1925, as I wrote in the Biography part of this essay.

Normally we see things with our physical eyes, and our eyes see things we choose to see. This is due to our personal prejudices. We think that we see things objectively, but we are only seeing with our ego's, and a person seeing in this manner is seeing an illusion.

In the philosophy of Aikido and in its practice, one has to see with the center. Seeing with the center is pure perception. As I have already explained, one should see things and all movements without stopping the mind. Seeing with the mind is not seeing the movement of the opponent, but rather seeing the movement of the opponents KI. To see the movement of the opponent is merely sight in a physical sense. In the ideology of Aikido you should be able to use the eyes of perception and the eyes of sight(ZA p. 88-92. ADK p. 194-200). In practice the can be trained by not focusing on the opponent or the movements, but by letting your physical sight see through all physical objects. This leads to the possibility of perceiving and seeing with your KI. Only in this way it is possible to perform real Aikido.

After years of practice and after reading several books about Aikido and the man behind this art, I am convinced that the essence of Aikido is the concept of KI. Without this

in mind Aikido would just be another martial art, or even for us Westerners, another way of exercise. There is nothing wrong looking at or use Aikido as a way of losing those few extra pounds, and a lot of people would be satisfied doing that. However, these people will never be able to grasp the essence of what Aikido is all about; the harmony of body, mind and spirit. It is like walking half way up mount Fuji to look at the view and only see half of all things, instead of walking all the way to the top and be able to feel all things. It is all a question of attitude, and how open minded a student is able to be.

In many Aikido dojos the essence of Aikido is not taught. Many teachers believe that understanding the essence of Aikido will come to the student by itself after years of practice. I do not believe that is possible. With the basis of a Western culture, a Western way of comprehending things around us, we need to be taught what Aikido is about or we will never experience more than the physical aspect of Aikido. Again I have heard many people say, that the physical side of Aikido is enough for them, but how would they know without understanding the concept of KI.

As I have tried to explain in this short essay, O-sensei's whole idea of Aikido is all about understanding the concept of KI. This is the way Aikido was created. If teachers neglect this they can only claim that they are teachers of self defense and not Aikido. As I see it, self defense is a very useful byproduct of Aikido practice, but it should not be the reason for practicing Aikido.

If this short essay made you think in a different way about Aikido, it has fulfilled its purpose. If it made you want to read and learn more about Aikido, you should read some of the books this essay was based upon, which is listed below:

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