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What is Aikido?

My understanding of Aikido continues to evolve and grow. I initially and still approach Aikido as a martial art. A martial art different than the traditional punching and kicking styles that I have studied in the past. Martial disciplines can be divided into 4 categories: linear, circular, soft and hard. I had already trained in several linear and hard styles and was attracted to the softer and circular style of Aikido. The theory of blending and redirecting the force of the attack was and continues to be very appealing to me. I am attracted to the idea that a smaller man could use the larger attacker's energy to control the situation. Aikido makes use of body movements to blend with the attacker and neutralize the situation without serious injury.

The system of blending and redirecting energy can be extrapolated to more than just a martial discipline. My current understanding of Aikido is simply a way of blending and harmonizing not just on the mat but with life; blending with the trials of life or the attacks of the universe and redirecting the energy. I use my philosophy of Aikido with my current battle with heart disease; trying not to be rigid but to be fluid and accepting. I try to extrapolate what I learn on the mat with my daily struggles, constantly adjusting and adapting to the trials put before me applying what I learn on the mat to my daily adventures. The theories of blending, maintaining weight under side, extending ki and relaxing are the basic principles of Aikido. These principles are applicable off the mat as well. As my understanding of aikido grows, I learn that aikido is not just a martial discipline but a theory of interaction. Simply put a way or philosophy of life.

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What is Shugyo?

Shugyo is defined as a period of intense training. This period of intense training is designed to focus the mind and prepare the body. Training in martial arts becomes a way of life, constantly developing ones skills and techniques. Daily training develops the techniques and skills of Aikido or any discipline. A period of shugyo allows our training to become more concentrated. Our skills, knowledge, and focus increase immensely. Usually preparing for a test fosters a period of shugyo where the student studies and prepares rigorously for his test. This period of time stimulates learning. It provides a focus to the students training. It gives the student a goal. This period definitely aids learning. It stimulates the mind and body.

For some people shugyo becomes part of our lives. For me as a surgeon everyday is a test. Every patient or situation becomes a brief period of shugyo. I am constantly challenging myself, constantly training to better myself. Every surgery is looked at as a test and must be taken seriously, from the large several hour surgery to the 15 minute case. On the mat, however, a test is an excellent way to intensify training. Daily training, although immensely important can become routine. A period of shugyo elevates training and benefits the student immensely.