

*What is my understanding of Aikido?*

Without knowing it even existed, I stumbled upon Aikido by way of my dearest love who wanted our children to gain the confidence that comes with learning a martial art for personal defense. I insisted on training with them thinking it might be a bit of fun but mostly because I wanted to know what they were learning and who they were learning it from. I have long been an avid student of military science and history, but my knowledge about the Eastern martial arts traditions was cursory at best.

While physically fit, I'm not particularly coordinated and a bit clumsy, so my expectations of technical difficulty were met immediately in Aikido. And those difficulties have not diminished as my extremely patient instructors have tried to move me along the continuum of understanding Aikido techniques and principles. To my pleasant surprise, I now could claim to know some semblance of the theory and practice of Aikido and know what the other systems at least look like. Amusingly, off the mat, I will occasionally think to myself, "I'm getting it". Then I show up for the next practice and quickly conclude, "No. I'm not."

I've long believed that principles inform the details and that details inform the principles. Aikido certainly seems to embody that exact belief as a core feature of its holistic approach to practice. Even more interestingly, Aikido ukemi teaches movement, connection, control and flow that become central to successfully executing techniques as the nage and handling the potential chaos of a real situation.

Fundamentally, though, Aikido is the Way of Harmonizing with Energy. Few things are more alluring and mysterious than the ability to harmonize with energy. In both the East and West, when discussing interaction among living things, the term, energy, is meant to describe not only physical and mental energy, but the shared energy of awareness that living things have for one another in motion, attachment and tension.

The Founder apparently intended and designed physical Aikido practice to teach the ability to blend and harmonize with an opponent to render an attack ineffectual. By harmonizing with an attacker's movement and intent, it then becomes possible to almost effortlessly guide the attacker into a position of safety for the defender and hopefully end the confrontation without anyone

suffering permanent harm. The Founder also apparently intended that the physical practice of achieving harmony would allow the Aikidoka to learn to harmonize with the shared energy of living things and the world. Within that realm comes the easy peace of quiet understanding and the ability to both guide and be guided in the world near and far in positive ways.

Just like principles flow from details and details flow from principles, I believe spiritual harmony flows from physical harmony and physical harmony flows from spiritual harmony. I'm hoping that is at least part of what the Founder was trying to teach and spread.