

TOOLS FOR HARMONY: AN APPROACH TO AIKIDO PRACTICE¹

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I suspect that for some Aikidoists there is a disconnection between the practice of self-defense techniques and the practice of interpersonal or spiritual harmony. The specific, concrete focus of Aikido practice is the physical details of complex, powerful defense techniques. We practice yielding to and harmonizing with physical force, but how does that teach us to deal in a harmonious way with emotional and spiritual discord? How does that teach us to cultivate an harmonious way of life? Does the process of cultivating physical balance automatically result in the cultivation of emotional/spiritual balance?

I suspect that for some Aikidoists there is little or no connection between physical and spiritual cultivation simply because we are not given an explicit, practical formula which relates the physical attributes of a good defense technique to the spiritual attributes of a compassionate and harmonious way of being. What might help make Aikido a more explicit practice of harmony is a specific physical map of the process of spiritual cultivation. What I have in mind is a musculoskeletal description of spiritual harmony.

As a body worker, I work with a method of somatic education (which I call Being In Movement® training) that focuses on how body mechanics relates to emotions, thoughts, beliefs and self-concepts. It is possible to use posture, breathing and movement to deliberately cultivate compassionate power and empathetic caring. I include some of these techniques of mind/body training in my Aikido classes, and perhaps they may be of use to the Aikido community.

KOKYU DOSA

Let's take one Aikido technique and inject into it a series of mind/body awareness exercises. Except when I am teaching an Aikido workshop, I don't teach a whole series of

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awareness exercises in one Aikido class, but for the sake of simplicity that will be the best way to present the process here.

Let's look at kokyu dosa. To create a baseline, do a few repetitions of kokyu dosa. As you do the technique, notice how you breathe. What parts of your body move in what ways as you inhale and exhale?

Notice your posture. How do you achieve stability? Notice which parts of your body act to generate the force you use to push your partner over. What sequence of movements do you use to get the force from your body to your partner?

Notice your attitude. How do you feel about yourself and your ability to do the technique? How do you feel about your partner as you throw him or her down? What is the link between your physical performance and your spiritual state?

VIOLENCE

Knowing what violence is will point us in the direction of understanding harmony, so before we get to exercises focusing on harmony, let's stop to cultivate the bodymind state of *violence*. As you do kokyu dosa, your partner grabs your wrists. Think of your partner as slimy and vile, full of anger and viciousness. You're afraid of him and don't want him touching you. You're angry and just want to get rid of him. Think of all the violations and insults you have ever experienced, and let your partner be the symbol of them all. Try doing kokyu dosa while feeling fear of and anger toward your enemy. What happens in your body? How does that affect your movements and your technique?

Most people experience that they tense and restrict their breathing, muscles, and movements. They experience that they lean toward their attacker to invade his space, or they lean away from the attacker to escape the attack, and they realize that leaning in either direction reduces balance and increases effort and tension. People experience that as they harden their bodies, they lose awareness and coordination. One goal of Aikido is to achieve fluid, balanced, strong movements, but hardening the body and losing awareness make that impossible.

Even more important, hardening the body is a spiritual process. When people tense their muscles and restrict their breathing, they physically pull away from contact with the attacker. They become less sensitive to the attacker and feel separate and alienated from the attacker. And once people have made themselves separate from the attacker, they do not even really experience the attacker as a conscious being, just as an object to be shoved around and destroyed. Most fundamentally, when the defender is tense and insensitive, he or she is unaware of and alienated from her/his own body and self as well. There is no sensitive feeling of and contact with either the Self or the Other. This lack of empathy and caring -- toward the self and the other person -- is the root of violence.

I would define violence as behavior undertaken in a mindbody state of hardness, unawareness, and alienation. When the defender moves in this state, there is no real contact between the defender and the attacker, just two hard-edged people rejecting each other.

This is the opposite of Aiki. Aiki is being present with one's own Self and with the opponent. Aiki is alert awareness, soft power, and compassionate yet assertive joining with the attack. And rather than being just philosophy, this description of Aiki is really an implicit description of effective body use and movement, which is achievable through paying attention to the physical details of posture, breathing, attitude and intentionality.

MIND/BODY UNITY

The crucial point is that the mind and body are literally the same thing, and therefore physical practice can be used to create mental results. The odd thing is that this is true if and only if the mind is properly focused in the experience of physical practice.

“Mind” and “body” are simply different words which describe the same object in different ways. To illustrate this, let's try an exercise. Put a pencil on the floor, and then stand about ten feet away. Stand up comfortably, and look at the pencil. By the way, this is a magic pencil. With it, anything that you write will come true! Wouldn't that be a wonderful pencil to have? Look at the pencil and want it. Build up in yourself a feeling that it really is a wonderful pencil and you would really like to have it. Actually *intend* to go over and get the pencil. It must be an authentic wanting. You must feel it in your body.

It is important to be clear about what “wanting the pencil” means. “Wanting” is not the same as “going.” Don't actually walk over and get the pencil. Focus instead on the *feeling* of wanting to go over.

It is also important not to become stiff and rigid. When I say not to actually move to go get the pencil, I don't mean that you have to make your body absolutely motionless. Don't freeze up and physically prevent your body from moving in order to focus on wanting to move. Just let your body experience the wanting and react to it naturally and spontaneously.

Another difficulty in this experiment is that “wanting” does not mean merely *thinking about* getting the pencil. There is, for example, a difference between “thinking about” loving someone and actually *feeling* love for them. Thinking about is more of a disconnected intellectual picture, but feeling is something you do with your “heart” and your body. Relax, be natural and create an authentic feeling in your mind/body of desire and intention to walk over and get the pencil. Most people can create this feeling when they focus on it, though many need some personal guidance to home in on it.

What happens when you stand and focus on wanting the pencil? Take some time to let the feeling build. Once you establish this feeling, you will probably feel yourself “involuntarily” tipping toward the pencil. For most people, this movement will be a small drift toward the pencil, perhaps an eighth of an inch (about a third of a centimeter) or so, though some people will actually move quite a bit. Most people will feel as though the pencil were a magnet gently drawing them towards it. (Some people will move in other directions, which has to do with how they relate to their own desires).

When you have an image of a movement and intend to execute the movement, your brain sends nerve impulses to the muscles which will do the movement. The muscles can act with a range of force, from a barely perceptible tensing to an all-out clenching. However, even below the range of what is barely perceptible to most people, there is still physical activity, the faintest stirrings of the muscles. You could call these faint, normally imperceptible tensings “micromovements.”

The pencil-wanting exercise is a way to help you begin to notice the micromovements which are the small beginnings of the action of going to get the pencil. All you have to do is wish to begin moving in some direction and your body will begin to do that movement. There is no separation between the mind and the body. Intending something is the beginning of doing it. Having feelings of one sort or another establishes the physical habit of having those feelings.

However, the arrow points in both directions. If mind and body are the same, then making changes in the body would make changes in the mind/spirit. Each affects the “other”. Of course, there is no “other”. The body *is* the mind. If wanting the pencil creates a leaning toward it, then undoing the leaning will be a way of undoing the wanting. By identifying and changing the physical aspects of our attitudes, we can change the mental/emotional aspects of the attitudes.

We naturally do think of attitudes as physical, though we usually don’t stop to notice that. Let’s try a simple thought experiment. Let’s imagine that someone gave you a drug that produced complete relaxation and didn’t permit any metabolic arousal. Your pulse couldn’t speed up, your muscles couldn’t tense, your breathing couldn’t get faster. Could you get angry? Could you get elated? Could you feel sad? When they ponder this thought experiment, most people immediately realize they ordinarily think of feelings as physical. They know they couldn’t have any feelings if their bodies could not be anything but limply relaxed.

It is important in Aikido to think about the problem of violence from the perspective of mind/body unity. The key elements in violence are constriction (or sometimes collapse) of the posture, restriction of the breath, and leaning towards or away from the object which is the focus of the violence. Therefore, in order to cultivate a state which is the spiritual opposite of violence, we can cultivate a state which is the physical opposite of the postural state of violence. This state would be physically relaxed, expansive, and balanced.

BREATHING

Let's start with the cultivation of a free and gentle manner of breathing². Stand and feel your breathing. In order to increase your awareness of how you hold the core of your body and how that affects your breathing, consciously tighten your belly, anal sphincter muscles and genitals, and then walk around. Notice how stiff and strained the tightening makes your legs, hips and lower back and your movement as a whole. Notice how restricted it makes your breathing.

Now, alternate tightening your belly and relaxing it. When you relax it, let it plop out. Next try releasing your belly -- without doing a preliminary tightening. Just let your belly plop down. Along with softening your belly, for greater relaxation, consciously allow your genital and anal muscles to relax. Was there tension to release even when you had not consciously tensed your belly first? How much unconscious tension do you usually carry around? What does it feel like to let your belly relax fully?

Most people experience a noticeable release even when they had not first tightened their bellies consciously, and they realize from this that they had been unconsciously holding themselves tight and that they probably hold themselves tight all the time.

Try walking around again with your belly soft. How does that feel? Most people experience greater ease, fluidity, and solidity in their walk. And that is how walking should be -- not tense and constricted. (Occasionally, people who are very stiff will experience discomfort when they relax their abdominal muscles. That is generally because there is undue tension in the rest of their body.)

Have you ever been told to suck in your guts? That's anatomical nonsense. Sucking in the guts creates physical tension and restriction throughout the body. Think about it for a moment. When do we normally and naturally suck in our guts? When something startles us! Tensing and sucking in the belly is part of the fear/startle response and makes it impossible to relax and move freely, strongly and comfortably. Isn't it strange that our culture encourages us to live in a permanent fear/startle pattern?

Stand up and notice what parts of your body move as you breathe in. Touch your belly and notice whether you suck in your belly or let it expand when you inhale. Then touch your low back, and touch your chest. Do they expand when you inhale?

What are the movements of inhalation and exhalation like? Are they steady, uninterrupted, smooth and flowing? Are there stops and starts? Does one part of your breath feel more or less tense than another?

² For detailed instructions on how to do the basic breathing, body awareness, and centering exercises I teach, see the file *A Downloadable Script for the Eight Core BIM Exercises* on my website, www.being-in-movement.com.

Before you learn the following breathing exercise, you need to know some facts about how breathing actually works. The important fact is that the lungs don't actively do the movements of breathing. The lungs are passive sacks that allow contact between the blood and the air so that oxygen can be taken in and carbon dioxide given off. It is the diaphragm muscle which actually does the breathing movement.

Imagine taking a bottle, cutting the bottom off, and taping a balloon onto the bottom. Now imagine pinching the balloon and pulling down on it. That would pull some air in through the neck of the bottle. Next imagine releasing the balloon. The balloon would spring back and the air would puff out.

That is how breathing works. The diaphragm is a dome-shaped muscle in the chest which functions much as the balloon does on the bottle. It is dome-shaped when it is relaxed. When it tenses, it pulls tight, flattens and pushes down. That is the equivalent of the balloon being pulled down, and it is that action of the diaphragm which sucks air into the lungs.

The key point is that there is a bunch of soft stuff below the diaphragm -- the stomach and intestines and such -- and that all has to go somewhere when the diaphragm pushes down. Flesh is pretty much incompressible, so the stuff below the diaphragm can't be squeezed smaller. It can't move up, of course, and it also can't move down. Down below is the pelvis and the web of muscles that comprises the floor of the pelvis.

Have you ever seen a baby breathe? When babies inhale, what happens to their tummies? They expand. When the diaphragm pushes down, everything below is displaced outward, primarily to the front where the abdominal muscles can allow movement (but to some extent to the sides and back since the rib cage allows some movement there as well). This is how infants breathe, and it is the anatomically natural way to breathe, but it is not how most adults breathe.

Stand up. Now, let your belly relax, and keep it relaxed as you inhale. Let the air fall gently down into your tummy as you inhale, and let your tummy expand. Your belly should be the focal point of your breathing, but it is important to let your chest and low back also swell gently as you inhale.

Compressing your belly as you inhale rigidifies your chest and belly and back and creates a lot of tension in your body. However, if you have gotten used to sucking in your guts as you inhale, breathing in a more relaxed manner will feel strange. At first you may even have the strange sensation that it feels physically better to breathe from your belly, but it is so unfamiliar that it feels uncomfortable to breathe more comfortably.

If expanding and inhaling is difficult, at first you may have to deliberately push your belly out as you inhale just to get the rhythm. Later you can give up this extra effort.

Some people find it very hard to figure out how to either expand or push out their bellies. A way to help with this is to lie down on your back, with pillows under your

head and knees, put a fist sized stone (or something similar) on your belly just below your belly button, and concentrate on raising the stone by inhaling.

Once you have found out how to expand and inhale, sit *seiza* (kneeling, sitting on your heels, with your knees spread a couple of fist widths apart) and breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. If *seiza* is too uncomfortable, you can do this sitting cross-legged on the floor or sitting upright on a flat, firm chair. Let your whole torso relax and open, so that the air comes in and falls gently down to your pelvis. (Of course the *air* stays in your lungs, but this image will help you feel the *movement* all the way down through your body.)

Breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth is useful for two reasons. It makes the absolutely ordinary process of breathing into something new, which helps you stay focused on it. Also, it is a bridge between an inner and an outer focus. Normally you breathe out through your mouth only when you are talking or expending physical effort. Both those tasks are directed outward into the world. This breathing exercise focuses on what you are doing inside your body, but its purpose is to cultivate an inward relaxation which will allow effective functioning out in the world.

Ideally you should relax your belly and breathe from there all the time. However, breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth is just for this exercise. In daily life or in Aikido practice, you should breathe normally, in and out through your nose.

The relaxation that starts with your belly and your breathing will spread throughout your body. If you move with soft muscles, your movement will be freer and more efficient. If you are tense as you move, your muscles will be fighting against each other, wasting energy inside your body. That energy would be more usefully applied externally to control and throw your attacker.

PELVIC ROTATION

Breathing well is not just a matter of correct use of the diaphragm and chest. Maintaining balance in the whole body is necessary in breathing freely. Beyond that, finding the balanced use of the body is an important step in undoing the leaning toward or away from the attacker.

Sit *seiza*. Notice the position of your head, neck and back. Notice where and how your weight falls to the floor. Are you sitting up straight? What do you understand by the term “sitting straight?”

Now slump. Let your body collapse downward. Let your back get round and your chest cave in. Let your shoulders roll forward and toward each other. (This is not the same as leaning forward from the hips.) And come back up to sitting straight. What do you do to sit up straight? What body segment initiates (creates) the movement of

slumping or coming up straight? How does it feel to sit up straight? Is it comfortable? How long would it remain comfortable?

Notice that when you slump, your pelvis rotates backward. The stack of vertebrae has no foundation on which to rest, and it curves and slumps down. (The pelvis can be thought of as a bowl which contains the guts, and "backward" is the direction in which the bowl would rotate to spill out the guts behind the body.)

Contrary to what most people believe, straightening up from a slump is accomplished by rolling the pelvis forward not by throwing the shoulders back or by straightening the back. If you aren't sure about this, slump and feel how your pelvis rolls back. Now, without moving your pelvis at all, try to sit up by moving your shoulders. It can't be done. Try rolling your pelvis forward to sit up out of the slump, and simultaneously puff out your chest and throw your shoulders back. Notice that movements of your shoulders or back are extra movements, which use muscles unnecessarily and waste energy.

When you sit up straight, you roll your pelvis forward, and that moves your body up out of the slump to an erect sitting posture. Notice also that if you continue rolling your pelvis forward past the point of erect posture, your back arches into a swayback position.

Some people find it difficult to do the movement of pelvic rotation while sitting seiza, but practicing it in another position can be easier. Sit seiza and lean forward, putting your hands on the floor in front of your knees, as though you were preparing to bow. Now, gently arch your back, letting it sag down into a swayback position -- like a horse that has had too many heavy riders. And then roll your back backwards into a hump. Move slowly and gently back and forth from the arched to the humped position, feeling how your pelvis rolls and your spinal column follows the rolling. Once you have felt the movement clearly, try it again in the ordinary sitting position.

It is important to note that there are two ways of rolling the pelvis into position -- moving the front of the pelvis down and lifting the back of the pelvis up. Each way uses a different set of muscles. Let's try moving the wrong way, lifting from the back of your pelvis, using the extensor muscles along the vertebral column. Arch your back by pulling your back pants pockets and your shoulder blades together. Notice that the movement takes place in your back around your waist. Notice also how tense this makes your lower back and your neck.

Now, let's find the better way, which will be very low in your body, deep in your pelvis, around your hip sockets. Do you know where your hips are? Touch your hips. Most people will touch the bone right below the waist, near where they wear their belts. That, however, is not the hip. It is the top lip of the pelvic bowl. The *hip socket* is a joint -- the leg's equivalent of the shoulder joint. Stand on one leg, then raise the other and move it around. Put your hand on the fold where the movement comes from. The hip socket is deep in the leg, by that fold.

Slump. Notice that when you sit slumped your pubic symphysis (the bone in front of your pelvis, just above your genitals) points upwards. Roll your pelvis forward by moving your pubic symphysis forward and down so that it points toward the floor. This uses the iliacus and psoas muscles (which are muscles deep in the front of the body) to do the movement.

You will know you are doing the whole movement right when you move from the slump easily into an upright and solid sitting posture. Your back and shoulders will not be actively engaged in effort but will move in a soft and relaxed way, simply as a result of the pelvic rotation.

Sitting upright in this manner, if you ask a partner to push on your chest, you will experience an effortless, solidity which will not be *resistance against* the push but simply a solid commitment to staying where you are. It will feel grounded and anchored. (Of course, your partner should be reasonable about how hard s/he pushes, especially if s/he is big and strong and you are not.) You will feel the pressure of the push somehow get deflected from a line going straight back through your chest into a line moving diagonally down and back. The pressure will actually press you into the floor and stabilize your posture, and you will feel that you are not working very hard to achieve the stability.

Just for comparison, sit properly and change just one thing. Bring your knees together. What happens? Most people get tipped back immediately. When the knees are touching, the lower back gets rounded. Moving your knees apart arches the lower back a bit and makes it easier to position the pelvis properly for strength. For another comparison, sit properly, and then squeeze your anus or your throat. Again, most people become weak and get tipped back easily. Try tipping your head to one side, and notice that that will unbalance you. Tensing or unbalancing any part of your body creates weakness, and releasing and balancing your whole body produces strength.

MOVEMENT FROM THE HIP SOCKETS

There is a movement that will help you learn to generate power from the hip sockets. Sit in the balanced seiza position, and lean forward a bit. How do you do this? Do you bend in the middle of your back? Do you bend your neck?

Try doing the movement again, and this time use your hip sockets as the hinge for the movement. Start by sitting up with your back vertical. Put your fingers in the creases where your legs join your trunk, just above and to the outside of your pubic symphysis. That is where your hip sockets are. As you tip forward, do not change the alignment of your head, neck and back. Move like a hinge, bending from the hips not the back. If you move from your hips, you will feel that your bottom will project backward as you do the movement. What happens to the muscles of your anal and genital sphincters? If you keep

them squeezed closed, it will restrict the movement. If you widen and open them, it will increase the balance and power in the movement.

KOKYU DOSA

Try kokyu dosa again, but this time pay careful attention to adding the elements of proper breathing, pelvic rotation and movement from the hips. I would suggest that, for simplicity, only the takedown portion of the kokyu dosa be practiced and not the pin portion. That is, sit on your heels in one spot throughout the technique, and don't spin to follow your partner down and pin her or him.

There are, of course, many ways of doing kokyu dosa. I suggest that for this practice here you use a particular arm movement. I often describe it for my children's Aikido class in two ways. You are holding a bowl of soup by the edges of the bowl, and you wish to pick up the bowl and spill the soup on your head. Or, you wish to pick up your hands and put your little fingers into your partner's nostrils. Either way leads to a movement in which your hands reach out forward while curving upward from the little finger sword-edge of the hand. This movement raises, rotates and spreads your partner's arms, which unbalances him or her.

Instead of feeling that you are taking your partner down by pushing with your arms or back, generate the push by a swiveling twist of the pelvis at the hip sockets. As you swivel to the right, cut with the right hand sword-edge to imbalance your partner. As s/he tips, cut with your left hand sword-edge to press her/him down.

When the movement comes from the hip sockets, there is a clean and efficient power that is elegant and graceful. This erect, powerful, fluid, balanced movement is the opposite of the constricted, imbalanced movement which is the heart of violent action. Paying attention to not moving in restricted ways is the beginning of stepping out of violence into harmony.

HEART

In addition to working on the large elements of postural mechanics, it is important to add subtler physical elements of feeling and attitude. In this next exercise, we will move to a new level of looking at the physical process of performing kokyu dosa.

Let's try an experiment with creating a loving attitude. Everyone has something or someone — perhaps a friend, a lover, a child, a flower, a work of art — something that when they think of it makes their heart smile. Sit in seiza with your eyes closed, and spend a few moments thinking about whatever it is that makes your heart smile. What happens in your body? How is your chest affected? What happens to your breathing? What sensations do you feel flowing through you?

Most people experience a softening and warmth in their chests, and a freeing up over their whole bodies. These sensations of being “warm hearted” or “tender hearted” are the bodily manifestations of love or compassion. If you stop to think about it, you will notice that very often we use physical language to describe emotional qualities. We talk about someone being “stiff-necked” or “warm-hearted” or “having guts.” There is a wisdom to this. Our emotional feelings are rooted in our physical being. By cultivating the physical state this imaging practice produces, you are actually developing the habit of living in a state of love instead of alienation, anger or all the other painful possibilities we so often embrace.

Love is an important step in the development of power, and this is rather surprising to most people. Love has to do with such qualities as softness, fluidity, mobility and lightness, all of which allow the body to move with more ease and balance. That ease and balance is an important element in the ability to focus and use power. When the body becomes angry and afraid, contracted and stiff, then fluid and efficient movement is not possible. When the body becomes freer and more unified, this improves the coordinated delivery of power in any action.

Try kokyu dosa again. Remember to start with the physical elements of breathing and body mechanics, and then add the heart exercise. What is it like to do the take down while paying attention to constructing and maintaining the bodymind state of lovingness? How does that affect the way you receive the attack and the way you touch the attacker? How does it affect your movements and the takedown? Most people experience that their movements are softer, more coordinated, smoother and more effective.

Loving your enemies isn't just philosophy. It results in practical improvements in your ability to control their attacks. If you love your attacker, you will be able to throw him harder. However, this state of love leads to more than just effective power. It also leads to a feeling of empathy with and caring for the attacker, which is an important element in developing harmony.

INTENTIONALITY

The first stage in doing any movement involves an inward planning or picturing of the movement. Intention is the next stage in creating a movement, and intention is a commitment to doing the pictured movement. The pencil-wanting exercise was an example of this process of intention. Underlying your breathing, posture and movement is the process of intending your body into action. The constriction and hardening that is a part of violence is a pattern of body intention, and replacing that pattern with a pattern of softness, power, openness and fullness is important in undoing the physical state of violence and achieving the state of harmony.

Stand up with your feet about shoulder width apart and your hands down by your side. Notice that you are standing on the soles of your feet. Where is the center of the earth? Way down below you. With the soles of your feet, reach down into the earth.

Remember not to just visualize or think about reaching down, but actually sense in your body a reaching toward the middle of the earth. You could feel it as a light beam shining downwards. Stay with that sensation/action for a minute or two.

Let go of reaching down. Now, with the top of your head and shoulders reach upward to feel the sky. Don't do it as a muscular effort but just as an awareness with a direction.

Try reaching forward to touch the horizon with the whole front surface of your body. And then reach backward to touch the horizon behind you with the whole back surface of your body.

Reach out to the right with the right edge of your body to touch the horizon there. And then reach out to the left with the left edge of your body.

If the horizon seems too far away to sense, find something closer, as close as you need for it to be a clear sensing process for you. You are probably doing this exercise indoors, so you could reach below the floor and above the ceiling, and out to the walls. Or you could reach out six or eight inches, if that is easier for you to sense.

Now, do all the directions together. Reach down and up, left and right, and forward and back. How does that feel? Most people experience this as spacious and energized, like radiant sunshine. They feel that it brings their whole body and the space around them into clearer focus.

This reaching outward is the physical opposite of the shrinking/constricting caused by fear, anger, doubt, confusion and so on. This reaching outward is a process of intending outward and is a physical way of practicing putting your body into a state of calm awareness and confidence.

Try kokyu dosa again. Start with the breathing, body mechanics and heart elements. Now add the radiant, symmetrical outward flow of intention. What is it like to do the take-down while paying attention to constructing and maintaining the expansive, powerful and compassionate bodymind state? How does that affect your movements and the take-down? Most people experience that their movements become integrated, balanced, and much more effective. Can you maintain an even, out-flowing awareness while doing the movements?

Could you generate this integrated state when you felt threatened by an attack? Keeping a calm, alert and loving attitude will improve the physical effectiveness of the Aikido defense techniques. And beyond that, it will allow us to deal with violence without becoming violent.

HARMONY

What do we learn when we practice an Aikido technique? That really depends on what we focus on in our practice. If we aim our practice at throwing the attacker down on the ground, then that is what we will learn. If we aim the practice of defense techniques at discovering and changing our inner attitudes, then that is what we will learn. Aiming at effective technique and expecting harmony to just come along is inefficient at best.

Physically efficient movement can be described in terms of the physical details of posture, breath, heart and intention. Deviations from efficient movement patterns will lessen the effectiveness of our defense techniques, so paying attention to the body patterns of our movements will improve our defense actions. However, that alone won't change our lives. If all we pay attention to is the large elements of physical effectiveness, we will tend to miss the very subtle physical elements of attitude and spirit. Consciously examining posture, breath, heart and intention as ways of detecting and changing negative feelings and attitudes is crucial in using physical practice for spiritual growth. It is important to get used to watching for violent feelings and replacing them with harmonious feelings.

Aikido offers a wonderful opportunity to forget our commitment to harmony. The attack/defense practice in Aikido gives us a wonderful opportunity to forget what we are trying to *become* in the stress of what we are trying to *do*. Aikido offers difficult confrontations as an arena for practicing the skills of handling aggression in a spirit of peace. Every time you are attacked, you have the opportunity to regress to normal responses of hardening and alienation. You may succeed in throwing the attacker to the ground, but you will have reinforced the physical habit of alienation. However, the opportunity to regress is an opportunity to remember to remember what your purpose is and consciously create the inner state of harmony.

When do you get a chance to actually use what you practice? If your practice consists of ways of throwing people to the ground, then you'll rarely if ever (I hope) get to use what you practice. If your practice consists of ways of balancing and integrating the body, you can use that when you rake leaves, shovel snow, play piano or work at a computer. But if your practice includes paying attention to your attitude toward yourself and your opponent, then you will be able to use what you practice in every interaction you have. Any time a driver cuts you off, any time a sales person is rude, any time a co-worker discounts an idea of yours, you will have the chance to scan your body, detect deviations from center, and re-create the mindbody state of balance and harmony. And, feeling harmonious, you will be able to figure what practical actions to take to remedy the problem harmoniously.

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