

AIKIDO

Aikido is the Japanese martial art developed by Morihei Ueshiba (1883 – 1969) in the early 20th century. Aikido is not intended to defeat opponents: it focuses on self-defense, not on attack. Aikido techniques redirect the force of an attack rather than opposing it head-on, and unbalance the opponent so that he or she topples easily. Since beating opponents is not a primary goal, the majority of aikido schools don't hold competitions.

Aikido is usually performed empty-handed. There are about 10 basic techniques. Advanced practitioners learn techniques with weapons, such as wooden sword (*bokken*), short staff (*jō*), and knife (*tantō*). Typical techniques are performed as follows:

- ① Position yourself by entering the “blind” area of an opponent (*irimi*) and/or by a pivoting motion (*tenkan*)
- ② Keep a point of contact with the opponent. Redirect the opponent in a circular motion, so that they become off-balance. Applying unnecessary force would either detach you from the opponent, or hinder your motion. So relax your upper body, particularly your shoulders and arms.
- ③ Place the opponent in your midline, so that you can topple them with minimal power.
- ④ Subdue the opponent harmlessly by a throw or joint locks.

Aikido is thus characterized by techniques that blend with and control attacking energy. Because of the economical circular motions and non-competitive nature, anyone can train their body and mind irrespective of age and sex.

The founder of aikido, Morihei Ueshiba, was influenced profoundly by Shinto religion. Ueshiba's goal was to merge with the cosmos and to work for universal peace. He said, “Martial arts are not intended to defeat opponents with physical forces or deadly weapons, nor to devastate the world with military weapons.”

Aikido began to spread abroad in 1950s. The International Aikido Federation (IAF) was founded in 1976. As of 2010, there were aikido training halls in about 95 countries. Considering the many unending conflicts around the world, it is to be hoped that aikido will be accepted in many countries not only for its unique techniques but also for its emphasis on peace and harmony.

