

Aikido

Aikido is the most recently developed of the martial arts and some would say the most spiritual. Its founder, Ueshiba Morihei, was considered to be one of the world's greatest living martial artists. Though he was a very small man, those twice his size were unable to attack him without quickly finding themselves on the ground.

When he was a young man, he mastered nearly all the martial arts. He felt, though, that there was something beyond what he had learned, and went off to the mountains to sit with a Zen master. There he attained a deep realization, discovering that "True budo [the way of the warrior] is love. It involves giving life to all that exists and not killing or opposing one another."

Aikido, which the master developed as a synthesis of all the martial arts as seen from a perspective of love, means the way of harmony. It is a dynamic kind of meditation, one that always involves another person. It is thus about relationship and the peaceful resolution of conflict. "The secret of Aikido," writes Ueshiba Morihei, "is to harmonize ourselves with the movement of the universe and to bring ourselves into accord with the universe itself." "The genius of aikido," writes George Leonard, a black belt, "is to transform the most violent attack, by embracing it, into a dance."

One of the first moves itself embodies the principles of Aikido. This is a half-turn in which the defender, grasped at the wrist, turns in the same direction as the attacker—so that the defender is looking at the world through the attacker's eyes. By first blending with the attacker's energy and then leading that energy down to the mat, the defender can easily make the throw.

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An Aikido Exercise

The development of *ki* is essential to Aikido. To see how the energy of *ki* is superior to muscle strength, hold out your arm and tighten the muscles as hard as you can. Ask a friend to bend your arm using all of his strength. Chances are he will be able to do so easily. Now, extend your arm in a relaxed way, and visualize your *ki* pouring through it and extending through the fingertips. Chances are your friend won't be able to budge it (especially if you center yourself first).

Massage and Bodywork

Bodywork and massage, essentials for tuning the body, are often viewed as mechanical healing techniques that are done *to* us. But in actuality, most approaches to bodywork are learning tech-