

## **Aikido as a modern Budo**

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Aikido is most often understood as a martial art used to defend against physical attack. It is added that the technical repertoire of Aikido consists only of defense techniques, the use of which does not require the use of physical force, which makes Aikido accessible to everyone. This is a very narrow definition in which Aikido is actually treated only as a discipline that shapes physical properties and gives technical skills in self-defense. Sometimes the ethical ideal of Aikido is also mentioned, defined as defeating an opponent without harming him. The aforementioned ethical ideal is basically the same as the technical ideal, because it means performing techniques efficiently so that you can fully control the situation of physical danger and take care not only of your own safety, but also of that of the enemy. However, even this narrow definition often differs from practice for two main reasons. First of all, the training circumstances are confused with the situations of real danger. During training, you should always take care of your own safety and that of your partner, and in case of a real threat, you should take care of your own safety. The compromise that we deal with in training, consisting in the safe completion of the technique, which will enable the partner to stay healthy despite the risks, does not occur in a situation where our or someone else's health or life is at risk. Then the absolute priority is our safety or the safety of the people we protect. Only when it is ensured, thanks to our technical prowess or for some other reason, can we ensure the safety of the opponent or opponents. Prioritizing, first and foremost, to defend oneself without harming the attacker results in the ineffectiveness of the techniques performed, and thus Aikido ceases to serve as a defense against physical attack. The same is true when the result is confused with the methods that lead to it. Performing techniques that do not require the use of physical force does not mean that the effect of their use cannot be dangerous to the opponent. Focusing on the "nonphysicality" of techniques makes it is easy to forget what their purpose is. If the emphasis is solely on fluidity and freedom of movement, and techniques become choreographic patterns that lack the element of surprise, characteristic of a true threat, then Aikido becomes a recreational and health domain, and also ceases to serve as a defense against physical attack.

Treating Aikido solely as a domain of movement with beneficial psychological effects is a drastic limitation of the work of master Morihei Ueshiba. The founder of Aikido was a student of both Sokaku Takeda sensei - the master and heir of the Daito-ryu Aiki-jujutsu tradition, who traveled all over Japan participating in many life and death duels, and Kumagusu Minakata - a man of extraordinary erudition, an expert in many fields of science, who knew many foreign languages, was a supporter of the unity of all nations and the unity of man with nature, and Onisaburo Deguchi - the leader of the Omoto-kyo religious sect, an outstanding expert in Shinto religious meditation - chinkon kishin. Ueshiba sensei, influenced by his teachers, began to proclaim the thesis that Aikido is the art of peace, and its aim is not only the unity of all people and the unity of man with nature, but union with the Universe. This was the goal of Aikido practice, enabling people to do so through development on many levels. Ueshiba sensei was an extremely spiritual man. His practice, which initially had a physical dimension, and its purpose was to be efficient and effective in combat, gained a spiritual dimension over time. He recognized that effectiveness in combat depends on something more than technical skills and a strong body. You need a strong and calm mind that can cope with a deadly threat or even strong pressure or any stress, so that a person does not panic, is able to correctly assess the situation, make the right decisions and implement them immediately. He created an extremely effective combat system, on the basis of Daito-ryu Aiki-jujutsu, but under the influence of his teachers, he began to ask himself key questions about the meaning of the fight, in which we put our own life at stake, what are, if any, values, for the protection of which it is worth taking it and when it should be ended. It was necessary to be embedded in spirituality, because making decisions on the level of life and death, not only in times of war, requires answering these fundamental questions. Aikido of Ueshiba sensei ceased to be just a physical discipline that cares about the development of the body and has also become a spiritual discipline that cares about the development of the mind. It has become a discipline that leads to the realization of human life goals thanks to the development in the physical, mental and spiritual dimensions. It has become a modern Budo, which, according to the definition of the master of Kashima Shin Ryu and Aikido Minoru Inaba sensei, allows you to follow your own way of Bushido - the Way of the Warrior through the practice of Bujutsu, a set of techniques that make up the combat system, while maintaining the tension that comes from having answered yourself to questions about life and death<sup>1</sup>.

The world has never been and still is not free from military conflicts, for which the concept of the battlefield should be understood literally, although the nature of the battlefield is constantly changing. However, even when we are lucky enough to live in a place where there is no military conflict, it is not so rare that the physical ability to fight becomes directly useful. Ueshiba sensei's dream of union with the Universe is far from being realized, since even a relationship with another human being can be full of aggression. However, while not everyone has to demonstrate the ability to defend himself, we all find ourselves, whether we like it or not, on the battlefield of everyday life. This applies to both personal and social life. Each of us must sooner or later, more often or less often, directly or indirectly, make difficult decisions, including those concerning life and death. Budo is not limited to effectiveness on the battlefield, both literally and figuratively, but it is used for personal development, which in turn improves this effectiveness, and also gives the tools to make subsequent life battles an opportunity for further development.

If Aikido training does not prepare us to deal with adversity, including physical aggression, it is of very moderate value. This is when it is exercised without any pressure or even a minimal sense of threat. It can be introduced not only by ensuring the reality of the attacks performed, but most of all by returning to the sources, i.e. sword fighting. Expanding your experience with kenjutsu and battojutsu training allows you to get as close to a real threat as possible. This is a great way to strengthen the psyche, and a strong psyche is a necessary condition to increase the likelihood of effective use of acquired techniques in a situation of strong stress. This kind of Aikido practice is a martial art that can be useful in emergency, but it is not universal. If it prepares us to deal with physical and mental difficulties, allows us to meet all life challenges, enables spiritual development, and becoming a better person - this is the modern Budo. Master of Kashima Shin Ryu Zen'ya Kunii sensei claimed that he teaches "to train the spirit and body of young people through the essence of true Bujutsu, to develop them as honest and fearless people with relentless spirit"<sup>ii</sup>. The practice in the dojo is not enough in this case. It is necessary to constantly explore what the fight is today, what challenges modern man and society face, and thus develop Bujutsu in such a way that it allows you to find your own Way of Warrior, which is a response to this changing reality. Aikido as a modern Budo is lively and dynamic. In its assumptions, it is the ideal of accepting reality as it is and experiencing it in a

constructive way - from the position of a strong, mature person who has a positive influence on it, both in terms of personal relationships and building a healthy society.

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<sup>i</sup> „What is Budo” – Minoru Inaba, <https://www.meijijingu.or.jp/en/shiseikan/3.php>

<sup>ii</sup> „Transmitting the Soul of Japanese Budo” – Minoru Inaba, Meiji Jingu Shiseikan 2008