

## Aiki Soku Seikatsu (Aikido is life)

By J.S.Hall

When I started aikido it was all about watch, copy, repetition, militaristic repetition, no speaking, simply the physicality of aikido with the only dialogue being an internal one. Aikido consisted of the satisfaction that you gained from learning or improving technique and the pleasant fatigue that followed every lesson. For many years it was never any deeper than this, no tuition on what aikido was outside of the physical or what it may lead to. What wasn't taught wasn't learned.

Comments made (always off of the mat) such as a particular action of another person as being "bad Aikido" gave an occasional prompt that there was more to Aikido than the mere physical moves. But never any guidance, explanation or assistance in finding and practicing these other elements. And just as the words of a parent to a child go in one ear and out of the other so did any deeper meaning to these.

And this was my training for many years, the action of learning the physical aspects of the art with little awareness of its greater value. I remember on one occasion reading the book "Dynamic Aikido", and proud as punch exclaimed to my instructor that I had read it. I was asked one question in response "so, what is aikido". I looked blank faced back and after a long pause answered "erm.... I don't know". So my instructor suggested that maybe I should read it again.

Well, I read it again, but was none the wiser.

Once in a while I would come across something that would revitalise the question, most of the time the answers would revolve around technical aspects of aikido. In fact the longer I practiced aikido the more technical my answers would become, thinking that I had a better understanding of the technicalities of aikido (thanks to my sensei) I could better hone what aikido was (and wasn't). I learned to describe how aikido differed from other martial arts and latterly the commonalities. But this was still only physical technical principles.

This view of aikido was, I believe, correct from the perspectives I had but were ultimately naive. Over the years I have considered and responded to the question "what is aikido" many times, and many times I got it fundamentally wrong by only responding on the physical aspects of the art, or as I prefer to think as Thomas Edison once coined it "I have not failed, I have merely found a thousand ways that won't work."

Teaching, has led to my eventual improved understanding of Aikido. You are constantly challenged to be ahead of your students, to find the answers to their questions before they ask them and most importantly to have the correct mind-set. My reason for teaching has always been the honest and open desire to give back that which I have been given, with the fervent desire to give people a better life.

By avoiding clashing with people (force against force), or scoring points over others, by making my enemy my friend, by seeing the good in everyone, by being true to yourself, staying safe and healthy and losing one's ego. These are some of the things that I believe an Aikidoka should learn and inculcate and with that the responsibility of the instructor to reflect these virtues and show the student the path.

It is true to say that even in the absence of being taught these elements one partially learns them through social osmosis. Just as a child who is brought up in a kind and loving family is more likely to

be a kind and loving individual themselves so is an aikidoka a 'good' aikidoka if they train with a 'good' instructor in the right environment.

This understanding has elevated the value of my aikido a hundred fold. Aikido is not merely a technical system to protect oneself or others from a would be attack or assailant, or simply a spiritual ambition often expressed in terms of ki, it is a development of self and a social interaction..... a "connection".

Shioda Kancho Soke Sensei's words "aiki soku seikatsu" which loosely translates to "aikido is life" have been there all the time, but as a child in this aikido world, I just didn't hear them. I do now!

So what do these words mean and how should we apply these to our Aikido training and ultimately to our life?

The practice of Aikido should be instantly equal to your life. Yes, instantly, that sentence alone is all that you need. Now, this is important, the goal should not be to practice aikido for 30 years and then and only then once you have an understanding of aikido reflect its lessons in one's life. But rather every lesson received in aikido must be immediately integrated into your life. As you learn you change. This is the way.

It therefore means that everything that you do in your training should be utilised in your daily life. At its simplistic level this means that the physical lessons of aikido are replicated. For instance it still surprises me that on the very mats that students practice the correct use of body form, minutes after the lesson as the mats are put away, bend backs, twist spines and lift predominately with the power of their arms. This shows that the boundary of aikido at its best is the lesson itself, it hasn't even stayed in the room.

How we interact with other students and instructors, our mind-set on the mat, how we treat our uke's, how we give our uke for Sh'te to learn. These simple things many of which have no bearing on the physicality of Aikido are all lessons in the broader truth of aikido. But why stop there!

At a basic level Aikido is physicality combined with a martial mind-set, but move on a few steps and Aikido is self, it is connection and it is social interaction. Once again aiki soku seikatsu means that the principles that one uses for the technical aspects of aikido are applied 'immediately' in one's life. Understanding intent, using the energy of others, harmonising with force and not competing with it (it's not about scoring points!).... These principles used in your everyday life are game changers, and the more you practice them the better you will become. The mistake is to believe that you must fully understand how to master each of these technical 'dojo elements' first before you can replicate them in life. Immediately is the key, don't wait until you are a black belt on the mat before you aim to be one off the mat.

So the next time you practice aikido think about how this relates to your life, how it can be used. Equally outside of the dojo when you are at work or with family for instance find opportunities to practice aikido, more likely to be the non-technical elements, although a busy train is a great way to practice balance and harmonising with people and your environment.

Just as the principle to 'Pay it forward' has large scale positive ramifications so does this understanding and application of Aikido. Through your actions, you will make the lives of others better and intern possibly they will pass this on. I believe that this is what both O'Sensei and Gozo Shioda Soke Sensei meant that through training in Aikido we could contribute to world peace.