

Chapter 9

Aiki:

An Education for the Peaceful Heart

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ABSTRACT

Although aikido is practiced in many countries, it is still unknown to the general public. Instructors have been teaching it as a new martial art ignoring its profound objective: it was designed to promote peace and human sensitivity based on a body work that teaches how to handle violence in order to achieve human success in life. Ai means “adaptation” and ki is the name given to the vital energy of people. When this energy is combined among people, it gives way to aiki – the conjunction of peoples’ energy in accordance to their human nature. The practice of aikido movements systematically educates for a peaceful heart that benefits society. So, this chapter presents its educational dimension and social possibilities which may interest educators, physical instructors, orientators, and even practitioners. Aikido is a transcendental activity designed to reconstruct human ethics and human interaction by teaching people how to collaborate and achieve their non-violent human potential, a peaceful heart which is their most important competence for life.

INTRODUCTION

Combat and fighting systems are exceedingly common in many countries. Boxing and wrestling are part of many cultures and have become part of popular entertainment. This has paved the way for better known martial arts (*karate*, *judo* and *taekwondo*) to become Olympic sports. Additionally, television shows and movies like *Seven Samurai* (1954) have contributed to the awareness of martial arts. This in turn has influenced American production companies to create a new action genre that combines martial arts and western films in a very successful way. A good example was *Kung Fu* (1972-1975), a TV series that describes the story of a man whose combat abilities, although impressive, were far less important than the balance and harmony experienced by the main character in regards to his body, his mind and his spirit (an experience his masters—a group of Taoist Monks—secretly provided through the practice of the Chinese art of fighting named *kung-fu* precisely). The combination of mystery, exotism and spirituality

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presented by this show contributed to the awakening of the American (and many other nations) public's interest in martial arts so that they began to be seen as something more than simply arts of combat.

Something similar happened to Aikido, a new Japanese martial-like activity that radically changes the old combative perspective understanding of a martial art, as it is a system that fosters harmony and non-violence rather than fighting and competition so much so that it can be not considered martial at all. Aikido was introduced to the American public in the TV show *Rendez Vous with Adventure* (conducted by Lee Green, 1958), but although this production shows Morihei Ueshiba –the creator of Aikido– in action, it only emphasized its superficial fighting-like form. Peaceful by nature, Aikido not only embodies an idea of winning without fighting but also provides a formula for human growth and social development. It was created gradually by the great master (“O-Sensei”) Ueshiba and took its final form after the Second World War as part of the group of fighting arts that were altered in Japan so as to transform Medieval warfare disciplines into personal development systems. Aikido is an activity that opens up a new perspective on life by teaching people to manage their emotions, as well as to understand and multiply their personal human strengths in order to benefit society and to promote non-violence. It is in fact an innovative educational system worth of serious consideration.

The contemporary appeal of martial arts usually lies in their perception as practices that can be used to build self-confidence and discipline, a concept that now goes beyond the traditional punishment and control structures, and is used to cultivate self-disciplinary regimes as part of one's leisure activities (Dyck, 2013). However the nature of many martial arts continues to be a practice based on self-defense moves and goals that leaves out those interested in avoiding combat. But Aikido's aim, by contract, is the cultivation of a higher human energy and values capable of transforming people and helping them achieve human success. This energy is developed through sensitivity and practical empathy, two dimensions that can help educate the human heart, as Western educators like Sir Ken Robinson (2011) has defined it (the center of total personality especially with reference to intuition, feeling, sensitivity, will, determination, and commitment). The difference is that development using Aikido gives this endeavor a different practical dimension than that pursued by arts like dancing, painting, etc.

According to the founder's ideal, Aikido is to provide a formula to help people in the development of a potentially creative energy that can be discovered, multiplied and applied by a particular martial-like training designed to develop conscience, vigour, confidence, human strengths and habits oriented to the eradication of all forms of violence, so much so that it has been called “the art of peace” (Stevens, 2002). So it is seen here as a specific and practical educational tool intended to be a part of peace education considered of “fundamental importance to the mission of UNESCO and the United Nations” (Matsura, 2008) and envisioned by the founder of Aikido as necessary to change the war-oriented culture humans have inherited from the past so as to ensure their survival.

MAIN FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER

By thinking of martial art training as an educational tool, Homma (1993, pp. 5-7) has proposed that it is important to differentiate between traditional martial arts and Aikido. Aikido is a system designed to specifically learn about harmony and human nobleness and its practice represents a space where adults and children can develop their individuality through a physical training that teaches them how to collaborate, serve and avoid hurting others (Stevens, 1984; 2001). Aikido's main objective is the person's human development defined by a constructive frame of mind, a development of human union, and

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