



The Spirit of Aikido

Kisshomaru Ueshiba , Taitetsu Unno (Translator)

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Aiki is the power of harmony, of all beings, all things working together.

Aikido-a modern Japanese martial art unique in its synthesis of classic forms with a well-defined spiritual base-offers a key to the art of living naturally and unselfishly in a complicated world. This book explains it in reference to the founder's philosophy of mind-and action. In addition, the history of aikido's prewar development as a non-competitive new martial art is described, with a consideration of its international role.

The Spirit of Aikido Details

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From Reader Review The Spirit of Aikido for online ebook

Jake Danishevsky says

The Spirit of Aikido is a nice little book about history, philosophy and the true nature of **Aikido**. The author, **Kisshomaru Ueshiba**, is one of the sons of the Aikido Founder Morihei Ueshiba.

Format

The format of the book is not as easy to read and grasp as some of the other books that I have read on the subject. There is a tremendous amount of information, but the style and the wording is not easy for an average person to completely understand. There are a few pictures of the Founder and the Author demonstrating various Aikido techniques, but it is very confusing and tough to understand. This is not the kind of a book that the person at the beginner or even an intermediate level of martial arts can grasp right away.

Content

Ki - Universal Energy. The basic principal of this book is to explain the history and philosophy of Aikido, but also to teach the reader how the Aikido utilizes Ki. Ki is an energy source, which brings harmony between mind and body. In the Western society a lot of times we associate Ki with Zen, to which the author responds as a misleading information. Ki is an energy source which is located about two inches below the belly button, but is not something that is visible. If learned how to use it a person of minor strength can tap into it and reach tremendous power.

It is sort of explained as a small child that does not want to be picked up from the ground. The child without realizing it is using Ki to ground him or her self becomes much heavier (more powerful) that even an adult is not able to do much.

Aikido, which is translated the Harmony Art/Way of Universal Energy (more or less).

Ai - Harmony

do - Art or Way.

The whole Aikido principle is based on tapping into the internal energy, which is **Ki**. The art itself is not a competitive art, but rather used to reach self-enlightenment. Aikido was originated in Japan and was one of the descending arts of Judo and Jujitsu. The original name of Aikido was Aiki-jitsu, which was one of the branches of the ancestor art and was not recognized as a new style.

The art of Aikido is a natural movement. The idea is to become one with the attacker and then help them move in the same direction. The Aikido uniform is a skirt like pants, which helps the practitioner move freely and flow through the motions. Unlike some of the other arts that bring the opponent down against the joint of the bone or by grappling, Aikido uses the natural movement so the attacker is not really brought down, but merely helped in his attempt of the movement.

The art was designed to be able to get away from the competitive nature of martial arts. Throughout the years Aikido has gained respect and popularity. The reason is that people gain harmony and self-achievement of personal victory without the combat. As the author explains, Aikido has gained a tremendous popularity among elder people and women, because the size and the physical conditioning of the opponent do not make

a difference.

As the book explains, there is even a great interest for Aikido among very young children. There are various techniques and exercises, which give kids self-esteem without competitive environment. This type of training helps them achieve various heights at their own pace. Master Ueshiba says, that even the spiritual exercises are a great success and is a lot of fun for kids. He says that when the kids were exposed to that type of training, they absolutely loved it and were really excited to try it.

History

The book also talks about history of Japan. There are various periods mentioned and how much influence Aikido has played in Japanese culture. At the time of Russo-Japanese War, the Japanese government decided to gather all the martial arts together and form an association of Martial Arts in Japan. Master Ueshiba, was not happy with making Aikido part of the overall Martial Art Organization and that is when the new name took affect and from then on was known as Aikido.

Though the years Master Ueshiba has gained popularity and respect as a founder of the New Art. Aikido fame has started to spread throughout Japan and the students from all over the land came to learn in the Dojo (place of learning or place of enlightenment). At first the master didn't accept just everyone, because he wanted the practitioners to use Aikido to reach spiritual levels not combatant, like the rest of the martial arts. His goal was to create an art where there is no strong or weak, young or old, winners or losers.

As the style became more popular in Japan, it started to spread out into the world. In the 1950s few of the places to adapt Aikido were France, Hawaii, New York and some other cities within United States. In the 1960s it was also welcomed in Brazil, Australia, England, Argentina and Southeast Asian Countries.

Today Aikido is a world recognized Martial Art and is practiced in a great number of countries. This days a lot of schools teach Aikido and the rules somewhat have been modified depending on geographical location, but the original principal of the Founder's Aikido Philosophy is still taught as a backbone of the art.

Conclusion

This book is a great lesson about Ki. The explanation is somewhat tough to understand at times, but gives you a great deal of information. The Spirit of Aikido is a biography of a very important man in the Martial Arts history as well as the explanation of the art, which he has created. I am always curious to find out more about historical events, especially if it has to do with martial arts. This book has definitely hit the spot.

I am not sure if I would recommend it to everyone, but if you like historical information, you might really enjoy this book. As I have mentioned previously, it is not easy to understand and might not appeal to everyone. If you do buy The Spirit of Aikido, enjoy it. You are in for a great surprise and enlightenment

Mari says

Very informative & charming

Tiaan van der Merwe says

Amazing look into the mind of Kisshomaru Doshu and his history with O-Sensei. I enjoy his opinions on the duality of the effect Aikido has on the world outside of Japan juxtaposed against the influence international Aikidoka have on the art. An essential read for any Scholar of Aikido.

- Note, I am currently reading "Surely you're joking Mr. Feynman" and seeing the War from both sides of the coin; Feynman relating his experiences in the Manhattan project and Aikido suffering due to conscription and the forceful merging of the Budo council for the war effort is massively intriguing.

David Rush says

It has been some years since I stopped practicing Aikido. But I think if you put in even just a few years of practice, the idea or feel of Aikido stays with you. You think about it when you open a door or when you walk through a crowd. Not that you imagine performing a technique but rather for a moment you are aware of others, yourself and how you all interact, or you notice your balance as you open a heavy door or lift a heavy box. You are ever so slightly more aware.

For some reason I was thinking about it even more the other day and an Aikido friend from those days recommended *The Spirit of Aikido* as something he felt addressed some of the core motivations for practicing Aikido. So even though I am no longer "in the game", I gave it a go.

Although there is explanation of some techniques this is really sort of a motivational book and description of what the original intent was with Aikido's development. There is a bit of a cultural difference in that it seems odd that Kisshomaru Ueshiba, the son of the founder of Aikido Morihei Ueshiba, never refers to Ueshiba as his father, much less "Dad". It is always "The Founder". Not bad, and maybe in this context it is called for, but still a little odd. None the less I gather he felt his purpose in the book was to promote the founders thoughts and not to reminisce about his papa.

After I finished it I had the feeling Ueshiba was striving to develop a practice that unified not only mind and body but brought people around the world together. But when checking my notes I didn't find any quotes that addressed that point. Still when you call your art the Way of Harmony and an attempt to setup a martial arts training method using "love" (loosely defined I think, since I've read his training could be pretty rough) I gotta assume that was his point.

But at the very least the whole point of Aikido is to not to confront, much less fight, power with power.

Aikido was born from the struggle to answer such vital questions as: What would I do when confronted by someone physically stronger than myself? Pg. 40

When one discards strength, one returns to the fundamental principle. If one does not rely on strength but uses ki, the enemy's strength will rebound and he will fall by himself. This is the meaning of winning by using the enemy's strength. You should carefully consider this matter. In brief, the weak overcomes the strong. Pg. 23

Not directly addressed in the book is what I took from my years practicing, that in any encounter you needed to be aware of the other person. And while the cool wrist locks and throws are essential, when you realized it was the other person matching your motion that was causing your demise you feel that they were more aware of what you were doing than you were.

The founder summed this up in this extract from one of his poems (Pg. 77) ...

*With your right hand
Showing yang,
Your left hand showing yin,
Lead your opponent.*

*When the enemy comes
Running to strike you,
Step aside, avoid him,
Immediately attack, and cut.*

*Why do you fix your eyes
On the swinging sword?
His grip reveals
Where he wants to cut.*

In general Kisshomaru Ueshiba makes more reference to Ki than I heard in my Aikido travels, but that may be due to an American aversion to such non tangible aspects.

There is this one bit that stuck out somewhat. It has to do with what happened during WWII.

The order to join the Greater Japan Martial Virtue Association as part of the war effort was the last straw... The Founder was patriot in the true sense, believing one should be willing to sacrifice his life for his country, and he chose not to protest the national wartime policy. Yet he disagreed with the move to unite all forms of budo under government jurisdiction; for him the directive had little to do with love of country. Pg. 101

I know we have to accept people in different eras had different sensibilities. But if your whole purpose is to redefine martial arts to a way of harmony and where there is no true "enemy", you might have a different opinion on your country's quest for world domination. And forcing Aikido to be part of a larger group was the "last straw"? Not invading China and Korea? But let bygones be bygones.

On a personal note, I was pleased that K had this to say about irimi-nage

The heart of Aikido is perhaps most clearly expressed in irimi-nage (entering throw)... One draws the opponent into one's own movement so that the two bodies become as one, then destroys his balance and throw him while keeping him in one's circle of control. Pg. 63

I was always horrible at this technique, because you had to ENTER into the attacker's space and somehow become part of it. I only rarely got close to what I was supposed to do, but when I did it was magical.

Eri says

I read it the first time in 1993, truly amazing to learn the "physical" form and at the same time tried to understand the philosophy of aikido...really opened a different perspective how this life would be. Love & Harmony. Balance of Life. It's like something we have been taken granted, but often ignored and came to notice when challenges of life came by.

And, now reading it again after so many had happened in life, after experiencing many kinds... just like seeing diamond from another angle.

Stuart says

"The Spirit of Aikido" by Kisshomaru Ueshiba is a martial arts classic done by Kodansha Publications. The author (the third son of the arts founder, Morihei Ueshiba), is potent and amusingly direct.

The title of the work explains its inner pages. Not a technical how-to manual, the author presents the influences, various pieces which evolved into the current practices of the International Aikido Federation, and was headed by Kisshomaru Ueshiba, now deceased. Along the way the author addresses the influence of women and children students on the current art. Explored as well are discussions of the physical structure, the breath, rules of Aikido practice, and assorted tools, qualities required for the arts potential mastery. The glossary of Japanese terms provides contextual page reference. The appendix of federation member schools is today a fine historical reference. Discussed on many levels are the spirit, the overall best intention of Aikido practice(s).

However the art of Aikido has many excellent branches and wonderful flavors. Unfortunately, the author seems to directly reject all save those with his particular perspective; lofty and idyllic pacifism. Three examples of this perspective include "...the essence of aikido is the unique Japanese philosophy which affirms the spiritual quest as the first principle of budo and the tradition founded by Master Ueshiba is the only true form of Aikido", or "...as long as we preserve aikido's rejection of competitive tournaments...", or the simplest "...when that happens Japan abrogates its claim to having developed a unique martial art concerned not with violence and brutality but with peace and love..." all found on page 117. Three simple examples found on the same page but similar examples are found easily elsewhere throughout the book.

Though articulate, and extremely well-written typical of Kodansha publications, a wider, more inclusive perspective could have been explored. Authors such as Oscar Ratti & Adele Westbrook Aikido and the Dynamic Sphere: An Illustrated Introduction, Stanley Pranin The Aiki News Encyclopedia Of Aikido, Morihiro Saito Traditional Aikido or Aikido: Its Heart and Appearance among many others would provide larger views of the Aikido mountain and its many diverse practice(s) and differing perspectives.

This book earns three stars for the skill of its presentation, not the sometimes narrowness of its message. For a wider understanding of Aikido explore many of the authors above.

Lena says

Great philosophy. I wish there was a dojo near me.

Bob says

In the years since I first read this book I've gotten 11 years of practice in Aikido.

Recently in our dojo I've seen a lot of conversation about "effectiveness" of Aikido. This is a common topic

among martial arts jock-sniffers. The most common current opinion being "if it doesn't work in MMA, it is no good."

So this morning I went back and read the first couple of chapters of this book, and I'm more convinced than ever that it is CRUCIAL reading. First, in understanding the notion of a "Martial Way", and second exactly how Aikido fits into the concepts of Budo and the Martial Way.

Joshua Donellan says

Obviously this book is primarily going to be of interest to students of Aikido, but if you have even a passing curiosity this is well worth a read. It focuses much more on history and philosophy than technique, and I was pleasantly surprised to find that it discusses eastern martial arts and philosophy in relation to physics and modern science, even discussing Carl Sagan at one point.

I started reading this as part of my research for my forthcoming book, and although it didn't give me as many insights (or bruises) as attending actual classes, it provides a well rounded summary of Aikido's significance and ideology.

David says

A good summary of the philosophical underpinnings of this wonderful martial art. The simplicity with which Ueshiba describes some extremely difficult concepts and techniques can be frustrating, but is also the charm of his straightforward writing and thought. I would recommend this book to anyone beginning or well into the Aikido journey.

Martyn Halm says

As a complementary volume to Kisshomaru Ueshiba's Aikido, this book provides the philosophical side to this magnificent martial art, written by the son of the founder, who took over from his father and helped Aikido gain worldwide recognition as one of the most difficult but worthwhile martial arts to attain.

A must of every serious practitioner of aikido and martial arts in general.

Jake Danishevsky says

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Marshall says

A nice little book summarizing the philosophy, history, and practice of Aikido. I especially like the discussion of science to help Westerners understand "ki," and Aikido's inclusive attitude. This book treats Aikido like the answer to all the problems in the world, but I'm discovering that's a common attitude among practitioners.

Larry says

Of all the martial arts classes taught, Aikido has the highest ration of women attendees. It is a great art that harnesses your opponent's energy and teaches you to redirect the flow towards your advantage. It has roots from judo and it's a great art to learn, from a physical, emotional and also spiritual perspective - where as most martial arts predominantly just teaches physical and emotional aspects. Aikido is just as much spiritual, in it's truest form, as it is a physical & emotional art. This book is a great intro or primer in getting you interested in Aikido.

Moustafa Aboul Atta says

This isn't a technical how-to book and it's definitely a worthy read for a student of a different discipline.
