

ESSAY FOR SANDAN'S EXAM JULY / 2022

**THEME: THE PHILOSOPHICAL PRINCIPLES OF AIKIDO AND THE
VIRTUES OF BUSHIDO**

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

Years of practice and overcoming some trials and difficulties have brought me to this moment, and I know that my efforts, my belief in Aikido, my admiration and respect for the Founder O'Sensei Morihei Ueshiba, and my perseverance, contributed to this.

However, nothing would be possible without Sensei Fernando Sanchez willingness to teach generously, without the collaboration of my training partners, without the encouragement of family and friends, and without the confidence I carry in my heart, that this art we have chosen as a path, is capable of transforming us into better people, for us and for humanity.

So, I thank the Universe, for granting me the privilege of being incarnated at that moment, and having found Aikido and this great family, which welcomed me and teaches me, every day, that the "True Victory is the one we have over ourselves.", and that in order to achieve this victory, will and perseverance are not enough, because it needs to be persecuted with virtues and with a good heart.

I thank each one of my friends and family, teachers, small and great masters, for their companionship during this journey.

Domo arigato go sai mashita!

INTRODUCTION TO THE SUBJECT: THE AIKIDO PHILOSOPHICAL PRINCIPLES AND THE BUSHIDO VIRTUES

In a daily basis, for a long time now, we start our training with some quotes of the Founder or attributed to him. Among them, there are two which I consider the best summary of the Aikido central idea: “The true victory is against ourselves.” and “Nothing overcomes the truth.”

I have chosen to study THE AIKIDO PHILOSOPHICAL PRINCIPLES AND THE BUSHIDO VIRTUES, because I understand that none of these phrases, which for me are very significant, would make sense without knowing the VIRTUES capable of making them real and viable.

We live in a troubled time, in which men have distanced themselves from moral principles and values, giving space to selfishness, accommodation and the lack of meaning about themselves and others. We have lost the knowledge and understanding of who we really are and how we should be, in respect of the Universe that surrounds us. We forgot our mission, which is, we are here to be better every day, and thus honor Creation.

Throughout my years of training, I could observe that Aikido, in its deepest philosophical techniques and teachings, provides us with tools to walk in this

quest to know ourselves, reflect on Who We Are, and understand that we can polish and sharpen ourselves, become better, day after day, using Aikido to accomplish it. However, if we do not have the clarity to see the Virtues of Bushido in every movement, we will be using only a fraction of what this wonderful art can offer us. Over the years, we may become good Martial Artists from the technical point of view, but we may not be able to become BETTER HUMAN BEINGS.

With my reflections, I intend to awaken in the hearts of my training companions, or in anyone who can read my words, this curiosity to go deeper. May they open their minds and seek what is behind their movements, because Aikido can offer us much more than a physical activity, or an art of self-defense. It can give us a Way, a Path.

THE VIRTUES OF BUSHIDO

I do not intend to extend myself in indicating the virtues of Bushido, as I believe that those who have access to the text already know them, but I think it is important to remember them:



GI – Justice and Morality

REI – Politeness, courtesy and kindness

YUU – Courage, heroic bravery

MEIYO – Honor, glory

JIN – Compassion, Benevolence

CHUUGI – Duty and Loyalty

MAKOTO – Sincerity, Total Truthfulness

Many martial artists understand that they need to learn the techniques on the mat and then test them in ordinary life to make sure they work in "real life". This is one of the biggest mistakes, especially among Aikido practitioners, as O'Sensei always made it clear that his intention was to offer a philosophical martial path, to lead practitioners on a path of internal struggle, not just to offer them a physical fight against external enemies.

More than learning techniques and testing their efficiency, whether on the mat or in the streets, what we need to do is test the efficiency of the internal concepts of each technique, and its depth in relation to the internal struggle of us all, as we seek self-knowledge and the inner evolution.

In this sense, knowing each of the Bushido Virtues, our ancestors Code of Honor, provides us with the essential tools in this search.

Therefore, I start to make a parallel between the Virtues and our Aikido practices, as well as their philosophical principles, and I ask permission to put here my vision about each of them, making it clear that they are the result of personal reflections. I invite each reader to make their own reflection, as they will certainly be able to come up with different and even better answers than mine.

THE VIRTUES, THE TECHNIQUES, THE PRINCIPLES OF AIKIDO AND LIFE

- PERSONAL REFLECTION

- **Yuuki (勇)** – Courage, Valor, Bravery: to face the difficulties encountered.

I have been practicing aikido since October 1999. The very beginning of the practice required courage, because I was 29 years old, and although I have wanted it since my teen ages, I had never practiced martial arts, once my mother always considered it not suitable for a girl. Only as an adult I had the strength to face my mother's prejudice and start my training. Prejudice was the first obstacle to overcome, and it took courage. Years later, I had to overcome two more difficulties: the first was a pregnancy at age 37, and the second was cancer at age 42. In both situations, courage was needed, because in the first I tried hard to keep training, and in the second I overcame the fear of not being able to train anymore. Both battles were won. The first with great joy, since I felt that my son was happy, in my womb, during training, and the second because AIKIDO and the desire to keep practicing, gave me strength to believe in healing and seek to be able to return to the mat, which I did after three months.

When I try to associate courage and bravery with the physical practices of Aikido, I remember my 5[°] Kyu exam, in which I had to do Yoko ukemi. According to Sensei Fernando, I was suicidal, because this roll was not very well done, but I knew it was necessary to do it and I overcame the fear. Today I know that what caused this fear was my need to control everything around me, and realizing that for a fraction of a second I am out of control, terrified me. There was no physical limitation, but mental and emotional. By overcoming

these limitations, making my commitment to do the best I could, during the Kyu exam I practiced YUUKI.

- **Jin (仁)** – Humanity, Mercy, Benevolence: to help other people.

It is common to see martial artists from Aikido and other arts, practicing as if the only objective is to obtain benefits for themselves, and often, they go beyond the interests of their training partners, to achieve their personal goals. Such goals, often driven by vanity and ego, end up distancing the practitioner from the JIN Virtue, as it takes away their sensitivity and willingness to help others.

In our Dojo, I have always learned that there is no worth performing your technique well, knocking your UKE down, immobilizing it firmly, if you use your strength and selfishness for that. More than beating the other, it is important for you to beat your ego and your vanity. Precisely for this principle, the practitioner who brings JIN with him, sets the safety of his Uke first, his connection with him and the intention to win with him and not defeat him. This is only possible when one has in its heart the ideal of union. In the same way, this principle must be carried out the mat, to our lives. In all aspects, in the family, in the social life and in the corporative environment, it is essential that we control our ego and vanity, and that we allocate safety, physical integrity and respect for others as priority, so that this virtue keeps us on the trail and in the search for enhancement every day, through benevolence, mercy and the will to unite with our neighbor, this is the only real way to find harmony.

• **Gi (義)** – Justice, Righteousness, Integrity: to choose the path to be followed and **Meiyo (名譽「名譽」)** – Honor, Credibility, Glory, Reputation, Dignity, Prestige: to respect and be respected in the decisions taken.

It is easy to read about the importance of these two virtues in Samurai history, but we rarely see how they are expressed today. I believe that the best way to exercise them is keeping them together, since they are perfectly complementary.

There is no way to be Fair, Straight and Incorruptible, without aiming for Honor, Credibility, Reputation and Dignity, and without understanding that only when coming from them, Glory and Reputation will be concrete.

Looking at the technical aspect, I see that when I practice KAESHI WAZA I realize the importance of these two principles clearer. It is easy for a practitioner to alternate his condition within the technique, especially when he has greater experience or technical skill than his training partner. But this practice will only be real if it is linked to truth, justice, and honesty. In other words, it is not worth to be able to perform the Kaeshi Waza if I use my strength, my agile legs, or my position as the highest graduate to do so, or if during the technique I finish hurting my partner. Winning at any price is shameful.

However, performing Kaeshi Waza in a clean way, with connection and care during the execution, and without the feeling of victory over the other, but with the feeling of harmoniously uniting with the other, means practicing this technique with Honor and Dignity, and only then will Glory come with Justice.

- **Rei (礼)** – Etiquette, Courtesy, Civility: to relate and live harmoniously with other people.

Something that caught my attention the first time I visited the Michi Dojo and attended Sensei Fernando Sanchez's class was realizing his feeling of respect for the group, and the good manners among the students. That realization made me feel that if I were to train in that dojo, I would be safe, not only physically, but also in terms of the respect manifested to a woman. For some time I was the only woman practicing in the Dojo and after me, others came, but that sense of respect and security never changed, and everyone has always noticed it.

However, I needed to understand that the fact that I was training with men, and that I was less strong than them, did not give me the right or set me in a position to be tough, harsh or brutal, to be able to perform the techniques. At first, I did not understand this, and sometimes I was scolded by the sensei, that I needed to stop using muscular force and stop wanting to “fight” with my companions. In addition of being tough on the mat, I was tough in my personal life, both in the somewhat troubled family environment and professionally, since at that time I was a lawyer. I needed to learn how to use “non-force” as a tool, and feminine sensitivity and docility as an element of my techniques. Today I can understand this a little better, and I ended up taking this teaching into my personal life, which proved to be healthier and more natural. However, the awakening of that understanding came when I, without proper control, hurt a girl which was training with me at another dojo, in the face, leaving her with a black eye. It was

an unpleasant and remarkable experience, but it helped me to understand that I was on the wrong path, and luckily, I had the opportunity to correct myself.

- **Makoto (誠)** – Sincerity, Honesty, Reality: to contribute to the personal growth of oneself and others around us.

There are several ways to understand this virtue, and many people associate it with love and acting from the heart. I prefer to associate it with consciousness, because only those who are aware of who they really are and what they are looking for, will be able to discover MAKOTO in their life. It is not enough to perform the other virtues, if they only come from your mind, in an artificial, forced way. It is necessary that we have each virtue as something real inside us, and that we experience each one of them in a true and conscious way, otherwise they will be something vile and fleeting.

I realized that some practitioners come to training just with the idea of a physical activity, or learning a self-defense, and they kind of "pretend" to understand the philosophical depth of Aikido to please Sensei or myself. However, in fact, their vision was still more practical and physical than internal and philosophical. This would not be an issue as long as this quest was not in disguise.

Over time, I have seen practitioners start like this and give up along the way, when they realize that inner change starts to happen. Inner change can bring fear. And I also see practitioners, cold and objective, and today are grateful for having a deeper vision of Aikido, recognizing their personal and human evolution during their training at the Dojo. This, consequently, makes them more committed to the Dojo and to all other practitioners, and makes them take into

their lives what they assimilate during training. Thus, I am happy to see that what we practice in the Dojo, somehow reverberates to other places, other people, and other realities, in addition to what we have on the mat on a daily basis.

When I try to understand this in the training, I see that every time I repeat a technique, no matter how simple or well-known it may be, I have the great opportunity to perform MAKOTO, because through the desire to learn and improve, and the humbleness to recognize that there is a lot to fix, each repetition helps me evolve, inside and out, technically and as a person.

- **Chuugi (忠義)** – Loyalty, Faithfulness, Devotion: so people can trust whenever they need.

I came from a family in which hierarchy and respect were greatly reinforced in education, and as an adult, I was able to understand the relationship between Master and Disciple, within the philosophical training, I receive through AIKIDO and my studies at the NOVA ACROPOLE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION, where I learn philosophy in the classical way.

Training as a disciple made me understand the importance of experiencing RESEARCH, DEVOTION and SERVICE, which are guidelines linked to the condition of disciple, and of seeking to follow a Master, who shows me a path linked to Truth, Justice, Beauty and Goodness. Luckily, I was able to find all of this in Aikido practiced under the guidance of Sensei Fernando Sanchez, and I feel the same is manifested among practitioners in the CALIFORNIA AIKIDO ASSOCIATION community.

All the virtues discussed above can only be manifested and become part of our lives, when practiced with CHUUGI, that is, when we seek to act with loyalty to our masters, be faithful to the principles presented by them, and dedicate ourselves wholeheartedly to take all of this as far as possible, and for as long as we can in our lives. I understand it, as the idea of practicing AIKIDO as thought and created by Founder O'Sensei, as close as possible to its foundations and principles, otherwise, CHUUGI will not manifest.

It is understandable that not all aikido practitioners in the world know or want to follow the principles of Morihei Ueshiba, but it is not acceptable that they do so in a fake and hidden way, as they are violating this very important virtue. In this case, it is preferable they look for another art, because practicing aikido without following Bushido, for me, is a complete disrespect. Alternatively, it is more honest to assume to their senseis they are not seeking this personal improvement, because in this case, it will their Masters decision either to accept or not the student /disciple.

Several times, I explained to my Aikido kids students, that the Aikido practitioner must be a good example for other people, and that like the students of the Philosopher Pythagoras, they must be seen off the mat as respected students of Aikido, as role models. Therefore, I say to them, they must honor what they learn in the dojo, avoiding being bad people, avoiding creating fights and confusion, trying to be responsible, good, and correct. From what I have heard from some families, the children who pass through the Dojo have followed this advice and, eventually, the children themselves have told me they think about it and put this idea in practice, which makes me very happy.

Sensei Fernando always says it is not enough to learn the techniques, without seeking to understand what is behind them, and without wanting to apply in our lives the moral principles they provide us. Aikido is not just a martial art of self-defense, because when we seek better understanding the Founder's objective, we realize that it is a WAY OF GOOD LIVING.

Therefore, I conclude seeking BUSHIDO understanding is indispensable for any practitioner, and the basic condition for his/her development.

VIEWING THE SEVEN VIRTUES IN HAKAMA



Explaining to possible non-Aikido readers, I will make some preliminary considerations.

Few people know, but the virtues are directly linked to clothing in martial arts. Each martial art has its Keikogi (稽古着; keiko = training; gi = clothing), the appropriate and indispensable suit for its practice.

In our dojo, we use DOGI, where the word Keikogi or Keikogui (稽古衣) is replaced by the word Dogi (道着) which means “uniform worn on the chosen path”.

Another piece that composes the aikido uniform is the HAKAMA, a baggy pants also known as joba hakama. Originally designed to protect the legs of samurai knights from injuries caused by bushes and branches while riding, its use helped to identify the warriors to the ancient Japanese population. Some researchers also argue that this clothing was used to hide the feet in duels and battles, making it impossible to predict an attack if the opponent knew the combat style of the other school.

In the practice of Aikido, its use varies from school to school, and can be used from the student's first day of practice or only by those who have a shodan degree onwards (yudansha). Historically, it is known that due to lack of financial resources, many students of Master Morihei Ueshiba made their hakamas with the most resistant fabric they could find. Many of them were made in unconventional colors, such as green and red, which led O-Sensei to standardize their use in black or dark blue for students and reserved the white color for personal use or for future great masters of the art.

Returning to the central theme of this essay, I will focus on explaining about the VIRTUES that manifest physically in the HAKAMA, through its creases or folds, called hida. In addition to the aesthetic visual appealing for its beauty, these creases have a much wider meaning in terms of Japanese society, samurai culture or martial art practice, barely known even by the yudansha themselves.

In the total of seven folds, five in the front (yosehida) and two in the back (ôhida), they can also represent the virtues of the samurai, as already mentioned in the beginning of the text. The large folds are also known, in some contexts, to represent the consolidation of the five virtues (五徳 gotoku) represented by the frontal folds. According to some testimonies and ancient documents, the act of folding the hakama by the samurai was a ritual of confirmation of their Do (道 path). When folding his hakama, the true samurai, with the real knowledge and follower of the seven virtues, used to meditate about his life and verify if he was walking the right path.

The book *Memoirs of the Grand Master* (Ô Sensei Morihei Ueshiba) – Editora Pensamento – brings us a lesson from the Master to his students about the hakama. There, Mitsugi Saotome, Ô Sensei's uchi deshi for fifteen years and instructor at the Aikikai Hombu Dojo until the founder's death in 1969, refers to his experience of forgetting his hakama and trying to get onto the mat to train:

(...) “When I was Ô Sensei's uchi deshi, everyone should wear hakama during the train. Since the first time. There were no restrictions on the type of hakama you wore; that is why the dojo was such a colorful place. I have seen all types of hakama, from the simplest to the most sophisticated and expensive. There were people wearing Kendo hakama, dance hakama and silk hakama – called sendai hira. I kept imagining those persistent students, who would go to hell to borrow their grandparents' hakama; exactly those made for special occasions and ceremonies, spoiling them in the practice of suwari waza.”

“I vividly remember the day I forgot my hakama. I was already getting ready to enter the mat using only my dogi (keikogi), when Ô Sensei stopped me. ‘Where's your hakama?’ he asked angry. ‘What makes you think you can take

instructions from your master wearing only your underwear? Have you no sense of decorum? Obviously, you are lacking the attitude and etiquette necessary for someone who follows the path and teachings of budo. Sit there, and just watch the class!

This was just the first of many speeches I received from Ô Sensei. However, my ignorance at that time caught Ô Sensei's attention to give a lesson, to all uchi deshi, on the meaning of the hakama. He explained that the hakama was a costume for students of kobudo (traditional budo) and asked if there was anyone among us who knew the meaning of the seven folds of the hakama. 'They symbolize the seven virtues of budo. Ô Sensei said: "They are jin (benevolence), gi (honor), rei (courtesy), chi (wisdom), shin (sincerity), chu (loyalty) and koh (compassion). We find these qualities in the ancient samurais. The hakama leads us to reflect on the nature of bushido. Wearing it symbolizes the traditions that have been passed to us from generation to generation. Aikido was born from the spirit of bushido, and through practice, we should strive to sharpen and polish these seven traditional virtues."

This and other texts on the principles of Aikido can also be found in the book "The Principles of Aikido", written by Saotome Sensei himself.

BASIC PRINCIPLES OF AIKIDO PHILOSOPHY: DEBT, GRATITUDE AND VIRTUES

Morihei Ueshiba dedicated his life on developing the philosophy of Aikido, from Buddhist and Shinto studies, and from his own perception of Ki, the Universe and the Life, experienced when practicing different Martial Arts.

John Stevens (2004), a renowned practitioner and researcher of Aikido and its Philosophy, presented us in several works, interviews and translations, some basic principles of this wonderful and profound martial art. Stevens also relied on the lessons from his teacher Rinjiro Shirata Sensei (a direct student of Morihei), the writings of Kisshomaru Ueshiba, and his own experience as a practitioner of Aikido.

Stevens lists as basic principles of Aikido the “four gratitudes”: a) Gratitude to the Universe which means to thank for the gift of life; b) Gratitude to our ancestors and predecessors representing being grateful for parents, great leaders, teachers, innovators, artists, among others; c) Gratitude towards others, because one cannot live without relationships; and d) Gratitude towards the plants and animals that sacrifice their lives for us, that is, we exist at the expense of other living beings.

These “four gratitudes” are directly related to four debts: a) we are indebted to the Universe for the gift of its great purpose; b) we are indebted to our ancestors for the gift of our existence; c) we are indebted to the wise men and women of the past for the gift of all human culture; and d) we are indebted to living beings for the gift of providing our food.

But, in addition to these four fundamentals, the Philosophy of Aikido involves, in particular, “four virtues”: 1) the virtue of COURAGE, where the victory we seek is to overcome all challenges and fight to the end; 2) the virtue of WISDOM, since Aikido is the art of deep learning, the art of knowing oneself; 3) the virtue of LOVE, because true Budo is the materialization of love, and the warrior's path is not the destruction and death of the other, but the death of his own flaws

and his internal challenges, which is obtained by experiencing life to continuously create; and 4) the virtue of EMPATHY that advocates the application of Aikido ideals in the different spheres of human, ecological, economic and political relationships.

From this analysis, John Stevens extracted the basic structure of values in Aikido, allowing us to enumerate the three philosophical principles of unity proposed by Ô Sensei: 1) the mind must be in harmony with the functioning of the Universe; 2) the body must be adjusted to the movement of the Universe; and 3) mind and body must be one, unified with the activity of the Universe (UESHIBA, s/d apud UESHIBA, 2005, p.25).

It is understood that “Morihei Ueshiba created these basic principles thinking about the hard period Japan was going through, among which we can mention rapid modernization and involvement in major wars. Thus, Morihei developed Aikido so that anyone could train and concluded that the true spirit of Budo should not be centered on competition and combat, but on seeking perfection as a human being through cumulative training, unifying individual ki with universal ki. (UESHIBA, 2005).”

In this sense, it is easy to understand why Aikido is not shown as a competitive sport, but as a philosophical path, because as we know, these characteristics of fighting sports are considered a way to selfishness and personal vanity.

However, it is necessary to emphasize that there is no criticism here of other martial arts that became sport and competition. In this sense, I transcribe: (...) “We are not criticizing the other martial arts for becoming modern sports. Historically, this direction was inevitable for its survival, especially in post-World

War II Japan, when all martial arts were banned by Allied Occupation authorities. Even as sports, they have attracted the interest of many people, both as participants and spectators. This is positive, as there is no denying that young people are especially attracted to martial arts because of the competitions and tournaments that decide who is the best in the field. Despite this tendency, Aikido refuses to enter this circle and remains faithful to the original intention of Budō: the training and cultivation of the spirit” (UESHIBA, 2005, p. 23). In this way, we understand that Aikido is an exercise to improve our human condition in its ethical principles related to learning and understanding debts, the exercise of gratitude and virtues as stated in the basic principles of this art of Being.

CONCLUSION:

Based on the herein exposed, and the reflections that I have been doing throughout my years of training, I pray that the readers seek to understand the real importance of Aikido, for their lives and for humanity.

We live in difficult times, times of pandemics, wars, increasing poverty and hunger, violence and selfishness, and it will be up to us and future generations to take care that human weakness do not lead us to the end of humanity.

It is possible to reverse this picture of moral, social, political and economic degradation, but for that, we need to correct ourselves, seek our personal improvement and transmit moral values and principles, not only within our closest ones, but to take this to the as far as possible.

And we have a fantastic tool for that, which is the AIKIDO created by O'Sensei Morihei Ueshiba, who generously allowed us to access what his enlightenment and wisdom once achieved.

In respect and gratitude to O'Sensei, we must honor his art, committing ourselves to this path of self-knowledge and personal evolution, and putting the VIRTUES OF BUSHIDO as weapons.

LET'S BE HONORED AND VIRTUOUS WARRIORS!

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