

MY JOURNEY WITH AIKIDO

When I first started my journey in Aikido, I felt like the most un-coordinated person in the room - but at the same time I was instantly hooked on it. The black belts moved without effort yet looked so powerful at the same time. I knew I wanted to learn to move like that too.

Now, as I'm coming up to my Sandan grading I'd like to take the opportunity to try and explain how I've developed since then.

The first thing I noticed in my early years of training was how my mood affected my Aikido. If I had a bad day at work or at home, my Aikido would be terrible, disconnected and sometimes a little bit too aggressive.

I learnt that as I would be changing into my Gi, I would have to stop and make a mental shift and almost change characters into "Aikido Greg".

This mindset was influenced by Robert Nadeau around when I was a 5th kyu and I attended a seminar at which he taught the principles of centring, grounding, opposite energies, character and how to become more present in the moment. Initially this was working great, I felt like I was developing, but after some time I started to hit a brick wall.

I had a similar experience in my younger years. I was in my 20's and a competitive bodybuilder. I was getting ready for the nationals, and it was the leanest I had ever been. I was looking at myself in the mirror, seeing my body and muscle but what I saw didn't look like me! I did not compete again after that.

I felt so disconnected from my body. I can now identify this as a disconnection from body **and** self.

I had the same feeling again when I was practicing Aikido – feeling a disconnect with myself and the martial art I was practising.

But isn't Aikido just a bunch of techniques that you just practice and then do better over time?

The answer could be yes for most people, but for me it's like watching people doing amazing dance – The Tango for example, there's connection, harmony, self-expression - foot work and technical movements only get you so far. You must have a balance of self and technique. You must look inwards.

If you look at a UFC fighter, they train hard with the goal of beating their opponent. They are amazing fighters, with amazing technique and this is great entertainment on tv, however some of the top fighters I've seen seem to end up having anger problems. These people lose their temper quickly, often having domestic violence issues, drug problems and large egos. They are not taught to reflect inwards. Often aggressive by nature they excel at these sports, but they aren't trying to find balance, they aren't trying to develop not only technique but also 'self.'

On the few occasions in my life where I have found myself needing Aikido in a martial situation, the result has been good with the threat neutralised physically and emotionally, the exchange is calm and not 'violent' in the same way that a UFC fighter might react and this is the exchange that I am looking for. Not an angry aggressive stance but a calm and balanced approach. This is what Aikido has taught me.

Summary

Aikido is teaching me about myself, it is changing me slowly over time. It is showing me things I need to improve not only looking outwards at my techniques but also by looking inwards. At the times I feel that 'disconnect' I know I need to look inwards and reflect on myself and my Aikido as a whole. Aikido has taught me how to ground myself and taken me not only on my physical technical journey but also one of inner reflection and improvement and making sure both align to create a balance. I am not perfect, and I never will be, but I pledge to never give up.

Having my own club for almost 3 years and teaching the Aikido principles I believe in has been such an honour. Seeing my students learn and grow as I have makes me so happy to be a teacher and Sensei. I'm excited for my future in Aikido.

I'd like to say thank you to my family, especially Abby for supporting me on this journey. My Mentors Dianne, Mark and Nicky who have always been there for me, and also my students who have created such a beautiful atmosphere in the club and allowed me to fulfil my dream of having my own Dojo.

I will leave you with a quote from O-Sensei.

Everyone has a spirit that can be refined, a body that can be trained in some manner, a suitable path to follow. You are here to realize your inner divinity and manifest your innate enlightenment.

Greg Moffitt