

My Aikido Walk

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Recently, I had the pleasure of hearing Anno Sensei share the wisdom of O'Sensei which, at 94, he says he continues to make his daily practice. His message, translated by Holiday Sensei and paraphrased here, was:

Aikido is Love. The Universe is Love. Our purpose is to practice while intending to cultivate Love in ourself and then to extend that loving appreciation and protection to all living beings. Truly a lifelong practice is to become congruent with Love in spirit, body and action. (I capitalize the word Love and all words that refer to Love to differentiate between human love and Love that is Universal and Eternal.)

Anno Sensei described well my daily Aikido Walk (a shout out to George Leonard author of The Way of Aikido for coining this term), which I have been consciously living for decades— meditate, practice Aikido in all my affairs and apply my healing protocols to address whatever keeps me from engaging life experiences with my Higher Self, mind and heart united as Love.

My intention for this exam is to be present, carry my head high, have fun, breathe fully throughout the exam, feel stable, aware and relaxed; to do my best, in Anno Sensei's words, to be congruent with Love in spirit, body and action.

Likewise, when I step into my garden, I am playing with the same Universal Love expressing so abundantly in the dynamics of my vegetable and flower garden. Do I blend with the growth of weeds or the abundance of sunflowers and lemon balm coming up everywhere? Or, do I enter and cull the growth that is infringing on smaller, more fragile plants? Is there a balance of both?

And again, when I enter the ranch with its fields of horses, where I volunteer, I step into their world. I do my best to be one of the herd, aware of how our movements are connected. Horses challenge handlers to establish themselves as leaders. The more I practice Aikido, the more I am able to use my Ki to communicate clearly and to get what I desire from my free roaming equine friends — stop at a safe distance, come to me when invited and move out of the way when asked.

Practicing Aikido also influences how I engage with my family, friends, strangers and events. As I have grown in Aikido and practiced my healing protocols, I have become much more present, compassionate and comfortable with blending or asserting myself. In these instances, I apply verbal Aikido. An example of blending might be accepting their unique point of view, listening deeply and acknowledging their feelings. An example of asserting myself would be asking for a change in plans or behavior or choosing to say "No." verbally or in action.

Whether it is on the mat, at the ranch, in my garden or elsewhere in the world, I know that what I see, hear, sense and feel with my five senses is giving me feedback as to how congruent I am at the time. When I am aligned, I feel a whole-hearted connection with whomever and whatever I meet. When I am out of balance, interference with my connection shows up in the responses I get from others or how I feel about what I or they said or did. My practice is to use my healing protocols soon after I notice I am out of balance, to release my old programs and habits, and

then to practice new behaviors. Doing this and practicing Aikido helps me hardwire healthier ways of being.

In my Aikido walk over the past two years, I chose to go completely against my childhood program, which is to comply and be quiet. Being raised in a manipulative, mind-control-like environment, the forceful, fear-based tactics perpetuated by the mainstream narrative, was all too familiar. As a wholistic healer, I knew immediately that a one-shot-fits-all medical solution was not right for me. I knew that practicing my Aikido walk, breathing fresh air, eating a healthy diet, staying connected with friends and family both on the phone and in person was in my best interest. My results have been the same as in all past epidemic and flu seasons — I have stayed healthy.

For as long as I can remember, I have been a supporter of the rights of minorities, children and seniors as well as nature, four-legged beings and winged ones. As an outgrowth of my Aikido walk these last two years, I now find myself also choosing to stand for medical freedom as well as our constitutional and human rights.

On my spiritual path, I embrace the wisdom that breathing is Love in action. It is life force. It is the activating Essence that allows, not only the brain to function optimally, but the greatest expression of Who I Am to be extended into this world. As a result, I am not willing to do Ki activities with a mask limiting the expression of my breath and sound.

In the early months of the lockdown, I invited the Saturday weapons class participants to meet in my backyard and neighborhood park. We met with the freedom to choose how we dealt with staying healthy — at the time, mask or no mask. I volunteered to host Friedl Sensei's online classes on my own Zoom account in support of keeping the dojo open. I also continued to keep the Aikido of Ashland internet presence current and to see that the Shomen was graced with flowers when I returned to the dojo.

I appreciate Friedl Sensei, St. Onge Sensei and others for honoring my right to choose and speak freely and for making it possible for me to train, regardless of the mandates.

Walking my Aikido in this way has blessed me with significant growth in self-appreciation, self-trust and compassion during these difficult times. I know that we all have our own unique Aikido walk. One is not better than another. For me, I can no longer give my power away when my Higher Self, heart and mind are congruent on a decision, even if it means saying "No." and offering alternatives to my Sensei's requests.

George Leonard shares a story he received from his Sensei, Saotome Sensei, about a conversation Saotome had with O'Sensei, after experiencing O'Sensei's Power on the mat. O'Sensei responded to Saotome in this way:

"My energy, my power, is not controlled by me. I am empty, but through my body flows the energies of the universe. My power is not my power. It is the universal power... Aikido will come to completion when each individual, following his or her true path, becomes one with the universe." (The Way of Aikido, page 30)

My Aikido walk is my "true path". I know it is leading me to fulfill O'Sensei's pronouncement and the teachings of other illumined Spiritual Masters. I acknowledge that it is a lifelong, one-day-at-a-time Aikido walk, before and after enlightenment. Going forward, as I enter the dojo and all aspects of my life, I will continue to humbly bow in to this knowing.