

Continuous Learning

Aikido is a martial art where you are continuously learning about yourself, energy, nature, your practice partners and the world.

Before starting my Aikido training, I went to visit the dojo in San Jose. It happened to be an Aikido Seminar at Aikido of San Jose. I remember the dojo had a good size room with a section for observers to watch. I saw a number of people practicing with each other after the instructor demonstrated a technique. Even though there was a large the number of students training, they avoided running into each other. They were aware of their surroundings. I watched in wonder as I saw people being thrown and taking falls in a graceful flowing way. Even today when I train and watch others demonstrate Aikido, I still have that same sense of wonder. I did not know much about Aikido at that time when I began my training but I took my first steps on this path anyway. I believe being willing to try new things is a great way to learn something new and expand your horizons.

When you start out in Aikido, you begin by learning how to take ukemi which introduces you to falls from various angles and rolls. These techniques help to soften the impact when you are thrown. It also helps to protect your body from injury. When I started out in Aikido learning to do ukemi, I went in with an open mind knowing that I had much to learn. I found that with much observation and practice your ukemi can always get better. I have also learned that students who are just starting out in Aikido may experience different emotions like fear and tentativeness of ukemi techniques. They also may be confused about how the ukemi is done. This is natural. Remember many of us have been there. People learn in different ways. Ukemi teaches us about how our body moves and adapts to different environments. It also teaches us persistence. When we fall down or roll in a certain direction, we get back up and go again. Ukemi teaches us the flexibility to flow with the energy that is being generated on and off the mat.

During an Aikido class the instructor demonstrates a technique, then the students pair off with a partner and practice the taught technique with each other. One of the things I personally like about Aikido is the partner practice. This can be one on one or with multiple students. While practicing you learn to work with students of different sizes, ages, health challenges and levels of experience.

Performing an Aikido technique informs you how the technique affects your partner. Aikido practice teaches us to not use force but blend with your partners energy. When this is working well, there is no resistance to your partner but a peaceful joining of both your energies as one. You also learn to have a solid base and let your ki (energy) come up from the ground, up through your feet and through your body while performing the technique. You learn about balance like that found in nature. For example, a

tree has roots that sink deep into the ground. This not only nourishes the tree but gives it support. We too must have a balance supported base while doing Aikido. You learn to be present and aware of your surroundings. When there are multiple attackers, you learn to move your body and blend with each attack. This is a good lesson on the mat as well as in life.

Another part of the Aikido experience is receiving a technique from your practice partner. This also teaches us to be present and aware of our surroundings. You learn to provide an honest attack so that your partner can use this energy to perform the technique. This helps your partner learn how to do the technique. Receiving a partner's technique also teaches us how to flow with a partner's energy instead of fighting against it.

When you join the Aikido family, you will learn that you are part of an extended supportive family. You will get to know not only people from your own dojo but people from other dojos around the world. This will allow you to learn from the Aikido experience of many people from different walks of life. This will not only help your Aikido improve and grow but can also help you to become a better person overall.

As you follow your Aikido path remember to keep training, be inspired, be supportive of others and always continue be open to learning new things.

Robert Summers

Aikido of Santa Cruz

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