

## Aikido – What the World Needs Now More than Ever

Over recent years in the United States, hatred, including racism, misogyny, homophobia, bullying in schools, and general hatred for people who are “not like me,” seem to be rising at astonishing rates. The number of crimes and hate groups have been on the rise. Rarely a day goes by where you don’t hear about a hate crime, malicious names being slung around, a mass shooting, abuse, or some other act of hatred. Many teachers have reported the use of slurs, derogatory language and extremist symbols in their classrooms, which are causing school children fear and anxiety. This needs to end!

Aikido is inclusive, creative, and spiritually and personally edifying. At a time when the country is becoming more divided, it is very comforting to come into the dojo where there are people of all ages, colors, religions, gender and sexual orientations, political leanings, etc. working together toward a common goal – improving and refining ourselves, spiritually, mentally and physically.

I feel strongly that if our leaders and decision makers would embrace the teachings of O’Sensei, many of our problems would be minimized, if not eliminated.

*The essence of the Art of Peace is to cleanse yourself of maliciousness, to get in tune with your environment, and to clear your path of obstacles and barriers.*

- Morihei Ueshiba

1. *Cleanse Yourself of Maliciousness* - The dojo is a place where each of us is able to cleanse ourselves from maliciousness and any negative feelings that happened outside the dojo, including hostile thoughts from our work, conflict with a friend, loved one, or some stranger who disrespected you during a random encounter during the day. We clear our minds of all the negativity by refocusing our energy on budo. Our leaders and politicians need a space like a dojo, where they can leave their partisanship behind, and regularly spend time ridding themselves of any maliciousness.
2. *Get in Tune With Your Environment* - Aikido helps us get in tune with our environment. How many times throughout keiko do we focus on grounding ourselves? About connecting, not only with our partners, but with ourselves? We focus on breathing, further putting us in tune with our environment.
3. *Clear Your Path of Obstacles and Barriers* - Our training also helps clear the path of obstacles and barriers, physically as well as philosophically. Our first movement is to get off the line of attack – to go around the physical barrier of your partner, and to find some way around the barrier using the path of least resistance, eventually unbalancing them, thus removing the obstacle.

Aikido is an ideal means of practicing conflict resolution and coping with difficult people. For example, tai no henko, teaches us to blend with our partners, and see things from their point of view. You start out facing one another, with them grabbing your wrist. Within seconds, you have become joined, two now as one, and you are now facing the same direction, and you’re seeing things as your partner sees them. You are no longer facing each other head-on, but, side by side, seeing the same thing. Similarly with iriminage, when attacked, whether with a grab or a strike, you enter behind them, and now are seeing things the same way they are. Shihonage is another instructive. Once you are joined as one, you

can easily redirect your partner to see things from your point of view, or you can change your direction and see it from theirs. These same principles can be applied when off the mat. In a confrontation, you may be able to reach common ground more quickly, by trying to see your partner's point of view and also having your partner see yours. When you have a different view on a situation, you will probably come to a compromise much faster if you can entice someone to see things from your point of view.

By opening our doors and welcoming all nationalities into the United States we have benefitted from so many different cultures – amazing culinary experiences, dances, and other arts. We are a nation of immigrants and are truly a melting pot. I love walking around the streets in Washington, DC and hearing languages from all over the world: some so uncommon that I can't even identify them. Can you imagine a world with no sushi, tandoori, pad thai, souvlaki, pho, jerk chicken, jollof rice, or injera? Although such delicious foods are a great benefit, more importantly, seeing and understanding different cultures, helps us be open to learning and doing things differently than the way we have always done them. Maliciousness often festers from not understanding someone because they may look or act different than you. Comingling with the different cultures broadens us. An open mind is what you need on and off the mat. It is also what the world needs to make it a better place – less maliciousness, being in tune with our surroundings, and making it clear of obstacles and barriers. The United States and the world need Aikido now more than ever. Let's all give the gift of a wase!

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