



A Roban for Sandan

HOLOTROPIC AIKIDO THE ART AS A HEALING AGENT

by Danny McIntyre, Riai Aikido ,Auckland ,New Zealand

The name "holotropic" literally means aiming for totality or moving toward wholeness (from the Greek holos - whole and treipin - moving in the direction of). The basic philosophical assumption of this strategy is that an average person of our culture operates in a way that is far below their real potential and capacity. This impoverishment is due to the fact that most of the time, the individual identifies with only one aspect of their being - the physical body or the ego. This false identification leads to an inauthentic, unhealthy and unfulfilling way of life and contributes to the development of myriad problems affecting our planet and its inhabitants.

O'Sensei left us with many encouraging words to aid and strengthen the spirit. He said "Aikido is medicine for a sick world. There is disorder in the world because people have forgotten that all things emanate from one source. Return to that source and leave behind all self-centered thoughts, petty desires and anger."

Not only does the art of Aikido provide a philosophy as a guide for practical living centered on peace, harmony and spiritual strength; the physical techniques are vehicles of transformation supported by the six pillars of Aikido.

Shiho-nage - four directions

Shiho-nage teaches the ability to move spontaneously with life's challenges as required in the present moment. The four directions represent different virtues - east: knowledge, south: growth, west: liberation, north: strength. This symbology is active in the world's major traditions - Hinduism, Sufism, Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity (the cross), to name but few.

Irimi - enter and blend

Life invites us constantly to engage with its forces. Often the best way is to move in and greet it as we would an old friend. We could say that in this movement we enter the fire

and are required to trust in life's processes. In world cosmology, this principle of surrender brings about transformation and awakening.

Kaiten - open and turn

Practicing this technique presents us with the opportunity to "open" to the possibility of harmonious resolution, regardless of the situation. Through acceptance, entering, opening and turning, the potential for a new perspective of mind and heart may be attained affecting all areas of our lives.

Kokyu - breath power and timing

With kokyu we are asked to relinquish our strength and trust the power of our breath, relaxing totally our mind and body. Breath is life. Who knows how many we are given? Everything breathes and ties us together - a common thread of life, pulsing and vibrating, to be shared by all. The essential element of timing, of being in the right place at the right time, synchronised with our breath, leads to refined attunement of mind and body with our circumstances and surroundings.

Ikkyo - control

Ikkyo represents firm control of a moving situation with elegance and maturity. There is a requirement for awareness and self-control accompanied by appropriate action to harmonise the situation. Every moment is a new one. A common assumption is the enemy or threat is outside of us, but O'Sensei tells us the enemy is within. A philosophical meaning of "the enemy" could be "the inner-me". This indeed could be the greatest challenge and requires firm self-control with mindfulness.

Ushiro - the unknown

The practice of receiving attacks from behind fosters a sixth sense that we may discern aggression before it occurs. We can translate this to "expect the unexpected" or be ready for anything. Sensei Richard Moon speaks of the whisperings of the Kami - listening within, quieting outside noise to develop intuition and contact with the "higher self". We learn to be safe by listening to our intuition and responding to it - to trust it.

The tools have all been provided by Master Morihei Ueshiba - a way of transforming ourselves and in turn our world, as we move toward wholeness and unity with spirit. A prerequisite on this journey of course begins with the first step. The tools need to be assembled, then practiced. Philosophy without practice - essentially all we have are words. Merge and blend the philosophy with practical experience then wisdom is released from within. Life's questions are answered through our bodies, our cells sing a new song and a new birth is activated - something new is born. Sensei Robert Nadeau encourages us to balance the frame and flow of our practice to "give birth to a new you" - a marriage of our masculine and feminine aspects. Carl Jung wrote "the greatest sin is to

be unconscious". Life requires that we are awake, aware and conscious, continually assembling the parts of ourselves from duality and separation to balance and wholeness.

In practicing Aikido we study conflict to understand harmony. An intriguing paradox that the ego can not grasp and cries for it's own expression through competition and winning. However, as we share the role of attacker and defender we learn to see both sides of a situation. Assuming the role of attacker or initiator we learn to be authentic, trusting and take responsibility for our selves. The role of defender or receiver teaches us to be centred and trust our ability to blend with, and lead situations, towards an equitable conclusion.

In the midst of danger and threats, calmness and a centred spirit become our allies, supporting us to breathe fully and function with the principles of nature. The alternating practice of defender and attacker provides a wonderful metaphor for all our relationships for the curious to explore and ponder. With diligent practice we can move towards a sense of the unity of humanity with nature and the harmonising of all things through the balancing of the complementary principles of yin and yang.

Historically Aikido has its roots firmly anchored in conflict. Centuries of war, invading marauders and the deaths of hundreds of thousands of warriors on its battlefields in feudal Japan evolved a special culture - the Samurai. His virtues being self-sacrifice, absolute loyalty and unquestioning obedience, living a frugal and spartan life. He was the most dangerous of warriors, a fanatic with no regard for his own life. He considered being defeated or captured the deepest shame. Rather than be dishonored he would take his own life by ritual disembowelment known as seppuku. I have touched on this subject only lightly and in order to give some sense of the incredible shift of consciousness O'Sensei underwent. During his years of searching, severe physical training and austerities, he moved from a deeply entrenched culture of a warrior mode to an understanding that budo is the protection of all life. The spirit of all life is part of God. There can be no enemy; the only enemy is oneself.

And here, now as I approach my 52nd year of life, preparing for my Sandan test, I feel humble and a great sense of gratitude to those who have gone before, to the great pathfinder Master Useshiba who created from the forces of nature Aikido, and his direct students who have spread the founder's art and philosophy worldwide.

I am proud and honoured to have as my Sensei Shihan Robert Nadeau who still carried out his instructions from O'Sensei "to teach the Aikido that cannot be seen". He has created opportunity in my life and Aikido ways to quickly shift levels of awareness and experience a bigger me. Here also I say thank you to my two New Zealand Sensei,

Henry Lynch and Mike Ashwell. Both in their own way continue to challenge me. It is through their efforts I have the contact with Shihan Nadeau.

Vital to the teacher/student relationship is respect and intent. If I think I am equal to my teacher then no study is required. If I have no respect for the teacher's experience and guidance I cannot learn. To drink from the tap of knowledge it is a simple matter of placing one's head below the tap as it is flowing. Furthermore petty judgements and comparisons have no place here. I simply remain aware and examine the virtue of my thoughts and suspend those that are unworthy. If it were only that easy! Yet it is intent itself that will redirect our awareness onto the path and as a direct expression of this intent springs creativity and rebirth.

Our world is a beautiful home. Unfortunately many of its inhabitants are dysfunctional, lacking gratitude and respect. Violence and terror abound in many forms. All violence is terror and all terror is violence, no matter how it is disguised. Aiki is love and love will always shine in the darkest corners.

Aikido for me has been and is, a path of joy and expression of compassion and integrity providing doorways to emotions ordinarily locked. Long held fears and suppressed emotions have at times risen to my consciousness demanding expression. Through the dynamic forces of Aikido, my own willingness and intent and the sensitivity of my teacher, I was able to safely release these emotions in an elegant and wholesome manner. I was no longer encumbered by the clinging memory of my past.

The desired result of Aikido, in my opinion, is not physical power of technique; it is the power of wisdom. It is to discover a more compassionate and powerful way to respond to aggression and leave the re-acting of old habits to graceful death. Aikido is poetry. A poem of dynamic rhythms that pulse with life. Life is evolution. As we continue to move towards wholeness and unity our vibration changes, affecting all our relationships. Those who come into contact with us may well sense an element of accord that attracts and stimulates them to a new and higher awareness of their world.

Violence will not and cannot create a better tomorrow as some of our world leaders would have us believe. Only the road of peace today can bring wholeness to our people and our planet.

We who practice Aikido, must I believe, dream the dream of our founder with our eyes open. We must heal ourselves, become whole. This is a journey into the wholeness of our being. A journey of spirit and compassion.

Stand tall, welcome change and move with the universe.

References:

Creative Victory from the Collected Works of Carlos Castaneda - Tomas
The adventure of Self-Discovery - Stanislav Grof
Aikido and the Harmony of Nature - Mitsugi Saotome
The Philosophy of Aikido - John Stevens