

"Onegaishimasu"

Sandan Essay

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"The purpose of Aikido is to become a better person". It was a simple statement, spoken quietly from the heart and offered to anyone who might be receptive. I purposely scanned the room to see if the statement was lost on this audience, my suspicion being there might be more interest in seeing a demonstration of martial feats of skill and flying bodies than in hearing an explanation of why we train. Sensei continued with his brief introduction, but I was left behind contemplating his opening statement. To become a better person.

First, foremost and at its core Budo, I have enjoyed approaching Aikido with the obvious martial application in mind, and with a focus on refining various techniques to continue to make them a more natural and integral part of training. A shared goal of spirited, rigorous training is the continual improvement of these techniques with a deeper understanding of the principles of Aikido- Mushin, Shisei, Musubi, Aiki, Kuzushi - and, to accomplish this, accepting the discipline and respect for others required. From the beginning, however, even without an understanding of Aikido, there is an awareness of something beyond technique, the special non-competitive nature and balanced reciprocity of our Aikido training... right then left, attack then defend, give then receive. We train ourselves to execute a variety of techniques, and of equal importance, train ourselves to receive those same techniques, and just as symmetry and balance are essential to our personal movement, it is very much integral to our partnered training and how we relate in the roles we assume as Nage and Uke. With continued training the significance and value of each of these combined acts becomes increasingly evident.

"Onegaishimasu". "I ask the favor of training- Thank you for what we are about to do." More than formal etiquette, this beginning to our training is a request, an expression of gratitude and an offer of commitment. We request our partners assistance to better ourselves and are grateful for what we are given by our fellow Aikidoka, our Sensei and the Art. As Nage we commit to caring for our training partner in practice and as Uke to provide our best ukemi, technique after technique, partner after partner. In practicing Aikido as Nage, attention to basic principles and form are tempered by an awareness of our training partner's abilities, improving our Aikido while providing for Uke the experience of feeling the properly executed technique without risk of injury. As Uke our efforts are offered freely and selflessly, without thought or intent to our own betterment, or to some acknowledgment or recognition

of our efforts, but rather for the betterment of our partners and Dojo. Often when receiving the technique we speak of "taking ukemi", or offer to "take ukemi", but in reality we give of our energy and bodies.

When we remember to retain a mindful appreciation for what we are given and to give in return, personal growth is implicit in the everyday manner and underlying spirit with which we train. This spirit, by example, carries from Sensei to student, Sempai to Kohai, on and on. In time the act and spirit of giving in the Dojo and in our everyday lives becomes less a conscious effort and more simply a part of who we hope to become- a better person.