

The Art of peace

- The true spirit of Aikido

世界人類が平和でありますように

In 1955, largely as a response to the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, Masahisa Goi initiated “The Peace Pole Project”. The peace poles are handcrafted monuments – symbols of peace, meant to make people all over the world reflect upon the importance of keeping peace ever-present in their minds and hearts.

If you stand in front of the Aiki Jinja in Iwama and glance directly to your left, you will see one of these poles, a pointed stone, grey in colour, stretching its tip towards the sky and carrying an engraving which reads “may peace prevail on earth” (in Japanese above). That this pole has been raised on these sacred Aikido grounds is, of course, no coincidence. As it stands there, in the gravel that has been raked by so many devoted students, it reflects beautifully the spirit of O-Sensei and the great vision he left for us to nurture and preserve. It is a solid metaphor of what O-Sensei wanted Aikido to be – an instrument to help us make the world a better place, a place where peace prevails. This is, I believe, the true legacy of Aikido.

There are numerous teachers in dojos around the world claiming to be teaching in the true spirit of the Founder or having profound understanding of the teachings of O-Sensei. Having spent almost twenty years in the Aikido community, I have found that “teaching in the true spirit” usually means preserving a technical form, focusing on memorizing how techniques have been executed historically thus often forgetting O-Sensei’s spiritual vision of Aikido. Sadly I have met few teachers that make an effort to set an example in conduct and politeness, being someone that their student can refer to and rely on, not only when it comes to technical skills, but also as a good person. All too many times I have seen teachers who enjoy great status within their part of the Aikido community, behave in ways that hardly reveal the true spirit of Aikido. Numerous are the conflicts between persons, branches or organizations that have their origins in situations or events that could have easily been avoided if the thoughts of politics, influence and personal gain had been set aside.

As teachers, I believe we have a huge responsibility in displaying a great sense of humility, moderation and courtesy. We also have to show understanding and benevolence and we need to do it, not only in the dojo and on the mat, but in our every day life. Having practiced Aikido long enough to become a teacher and guide to other students, it is most likely that we long ago have decided that Aikido is something more than just physical training and a number of technical exercises. It is a path to follow and that path does not restrict itself to the dojo walls and the scheduled training of the week – it is in everything we do and everything we say. The teacher that wants to set an example tries to apply the principles of Aikido on every situation in life – in training, in work, with the family, among friends or strangers. To that kind of teacher, “in the spirit of the Founder” means something much more than being able to display a number of techniques. It means having accepted a responsibility and that that responsibility starts in the dojo

but also stretches far beyond it. It means having decided to use obtained knowledge to try to avoid conflict in a greater aspect than being able to defend yourself physically. It means that the mind is set on unification and preservation of the delicate balance of everything and everyone in the world. It means, we are practising Aikido in true spirit of the Founder.

“These days, the differences of ideology, the confrontation of races and conflict between nations, leads to numerous problems from the destruction of the environment to economic friction. All opposition or antagonism leads to greater conflict.

A premise of Aikido is the avoidance of rivalry or any form of opposition. If the people of the world would make an effort to learn how to avoid dissension through the practice of Aikido I am sure that mankind could realise genuine unification.

Therefore, we as instructors must do our best to gain this ideal.”

Soke Gozo Shioda