

The Art Of Peace

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An Introduction To Aikido

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Writings on Aikido brought together by Sensei Ronnie Smith

Why Practice Aikido?

As a martial art, Aikido is a little bit different. Aikido generally has no competitive tournaments and we train in purely defensive techniques (such as joint controls and throws) not attacking techniques (such as punching and kicking).

Aikido combines effective self-defence skills and strategies with a philosophy of non-violence. Our style of Aikido focuses on the development of "Ki", which in Japanese mean "universal energy" but encompasses co-ordination, timing and living calmness.

While other martial artists reach their peak often in their 20s or 30s (with the limitations of the physical body), in Aikido we can continue to improve over time as often the effectiveness of the art is not about the physical aspect. This is hard to explain and must be experienced to fully grasp.

What is Aikido?

The word Aikido is a Japanese word that has no exact translation in English but roughly translates to: "the way of harmonising with Ki". The word Ki may be translated as "life force" or "universal energy". Therefore, Aikido is "The way of harmonising with universal energy".

Many people see Aikido as being the martial art famous for a few things

- using the attacker's energy against them
- defending ourselves without harming the attacker (as much as is possible)

You may also have seen Aikido demonstrated by Steven Seagal in some of his successful blockbuster films.

The techniques of Aikido can seem strange at first and many people would ask "who would attack you like that?".

Indeed, the techniques really come from an early time when swords and weapons were commonly carried and protective armour may have been worn. Some people say "Aikido comes from the sword" and this may be true. The techniques of Aikido allow us to develop our body and mind. Correct practise of the technique allows us to develop our Ki.

We learn joint locks that allow us to control and disarm an attacker. We also study defence from multiple attackers and from weapons. We have a form of sparring training known as randori in which we learn to develop kokyunage (breath throw) techniques to deal with on coming attacks. Aikido can be fun, effective and mind expanding. You have to come along to see for yourself.

What Aikido is Not

If you are looking for combat and competition, then Aikido is probably not for you. We do not have competitions or practise with intense sparring. If you are looking to fight or learn to be a fighter, this is most likely not for you but you are welcome to come along.

Though Aikido can be good for fitness, if you are looking for something for a high intensity workout, this may not be right for you either. Aikido is good exercise but will not help you develop elite levels of strength or cardio fitness and you should continue to find other activities to develop those with.

Aikido Philosophy

Aikido means the Way, (do), of harmony, (ai), with Ki. It is easier to feel Ki than to explain it. In Aikido it is perhaps the sense of perfect timing, blending and breathing experienced when executing a technique correctly. It is the "life force" that permeates the universe. If Ki is used, control of an attacker is effortless. Development of Ki is a central theme in Aikido practice.

Aikido is a non-competitive art and is practised in a very positive environment, as opposed to a combative atmosphere where brute strength dominates and victory at any cost is the paramount objective.

Although Aikido technique can be applied at varying levels of severity, in a continuum from the most gentle controlling techniques to the most severe countermeasures, practitioners develop a sensitivity to the experience and ability of their fellow students and practice accordingly. Since when practised correctly Aikido requires no physical strength, it can be practised by anyone, regardless of age or sex. Through regular training one becomes fit, healthy and fully alive.

Aikido is more than an efficient method of self-defence. It denotes a path of understanding, a way of life, and the Way of the universe itself, encouraging the refinement and development of the human character.

The qualities and principles of the ideal warrior; courage, decisiveness, strength, clarity of mind, compassion, are also the ideal qualities of the human being. Everything in Aikido training is meant to develop not only a strong individual, but one with the wisdom and energy to positively benefit society.

A true martial artist views conflict not merely as a contest with others, but as an opportunity to forge oneself and overcome our true enemies, which are within.

A person who trains in Aikido can often overcome an attacker who is much bigger or stronger. This is because the power used in Aikido can be much greater than your size may lead you to believe. Rather than stressing and tensing only a few muscles, you learn to relax and move from the centre of your body, where you are most powerful. This relaxation is learned automatically, since without it the techniques will not function properly.

Aikido training does not view the body and mind as separate, so the physical relaxation learnt in Aikido naturally becomes mental relaxation. Likewise, the perseverance and confidence that develop mentally are also manifested in the body.

Any psychological or spiritual insight must be reflected in the body, or else it tends to be little more than intellectualising; under pressure such insights disappear and the person reverts to previously ingrained habits and patterns.

Aikido training requires the student to squarely face conflict. Patterns of avoidance and fear are broken. The tense, defensive reactions to pressure and conflict are recognised and deconstructed. A new person; straightforward and brave, yet humble, able to be both strong and yielding as circumstances require, emerges from this training.

The practice of Aikido ultimately must become the practice of our daily lives. Every moment of life involves some sort of conflict; with others, with our environments, with our bodies, with ourselves.

It is our choice whether to see this conflict as something to be avoided and struggled with, or as the creative force of change which makes true growth and learning possible.

In order to develop the true human potential, some sort of discipline and refinement is necessary. To develop awareness, decisiveness, inner power and compassion, we must experience the hardship and work of facing life squarely. Life itself must be used to forge ourselves.

Aikido – The Gentleman's Art by Sensei Ken Williams

Aikido was founded by one of Japan's leading exponents of the martial arts, Master Morihei Ueshiba, who had studied for many years under the leading teachers of Jujutsu, Fencing and Spear Fighting then available.

Although in the fullness of time Master Ueshiba became a renowned fighter, he found that he could not be satisfied with any of the styles he had studied. Since, with any basically physical or competitive art, success depends so greatly on the comparative youth, speed and strength of the practitioner.

After many years of study and meditation, Master Ueshiba perfected the art of Aikido. Japan's first spiritual martial art.

Aikido has often been referred to as the gentlemen's fighting art. Though it is not an unfamiliar word, few outside the world of the martial arts can distinguish it from various other 'methods of self-defence'. Its trademark however, lies partly in its sophisticated style and particularly in its essential motivations.

Aikido is a method of self defence which can be used against any form of attack, and at its highest levels, a discipline of coordination, a 'WAY' of harmonising all of man's vital powers.

There is no attack in Aikido. Its goal is merely to neutralise an aggression and render the attacker harmless without causing him any serious injury. If at all possible.

To do this requires skill. But even more, it requires an ethical intention. The very word Aikido, in fact, contains the three elements which comprise the art: (Ai) harmony or co-ordination, (Ki) spirit or energy, (Do) the method or 'the way'.

A man who studies and practises Aikido correctly desires only to defend himself without hurting others. To possess this attitude, one must achieve a very high level of integration of the powers of mind and body, the harmonious combination of physical means and ethical motives.

Aikido is taught and used by police forces in Germany, Hawaii and the United States of America. Its use by British police forces has also been approved by the Home Office and basic Aikido techniques are taught to British troops performing duty in Northern Ireland.

This article on Ki and Aikido is the first of a series written by Sensei Williams in 1990. In this article he describes the nature of Ki and its effects.

Ki And Aiki by Sensei Ken Williams

The Japanese word “Ki” is sometimes translated as meaning “Life Power” or “Vital Energy”. It is claimed to be a form of energy distinct from that related to pure physical size, or muscular strength. It is also claimed to be independent of the mechanical efficiency derived from acquired technical skills. Man has not yet made the advances required to qualify and quantify, in scientific terms, the nature of Ki when translated and described in this way. But this is not necessary for one to acquire the ability to use it effectively.

My belief in the existence of Ki stems from many personal experiences, some of which are described below.

Firstly, in the practice of Aikido, I have experienced the ability of some teachers, or students of Aikido, to emit what can only be described as a strong flow of energy. This can be felt with or without physical contact. The strength of this flow can be varied at will, depending on circumstances. In those case when physical contact is made, the touch is light and gentle, but the desired result is effectively and effortlessly achieved.

Secondly, one can, with the correct training, feel a flow of energy within the body; a feeling of well-being or elation. This is in line with the experiences of those who have mapped out the energy meridians, as used by various schools of therapy and transmitted by trained therapists with beneficial results. The flow of Ki, from someone not trained correctly on how to use it, is virtually undetectable.

Thirdly, anyone, regardless of age, sex and physical stature can be taught to develop a strong flow of Ki which can be manifested and readily felt by others.

These reasons why I believe Ki exists will not remove the doubt in the minds of some people. They will not remove obvious misunderstandings about what it means to have strong Ki, and the Mind and Body states required for its development. Real sceptics probably have to experience a flow of Ki for themselves, but the misunderstandings can be cleared up and the remainder of this article attempts to do so.

Everyone has a flow of Ki, even if that flow is weak. When the flow through our body is weak, we are prone to contracting ailments, and when it stops we die. If we can liken our mind to a generator, we can either generate 6 volts or 6,000 volts by our attitude. Some people perform their daily tasks with enthusiasm and a positive will in an honest way. These types are the ones that extend a tremendous amount of Ki, while others who are negative and devious in their outlook, do not allow their Ki to flow strongly. However, each of us has the potential for vastly increasing our flow of Ki and there is no known limit to this development.

Training in the development of strong Ki is really training in how to use the supply of Ki by interchanging with the Universe. The more we use this supply the more it grows and the stronger its flow becomes. Ki is not stored in the body as some people may think, but is taken in, then flows out continuously.

For there to be any bodily movement or intention, there must be a specific flow of Ki and an exercise of will in the appropriate direction (even though Ki flows at all times and in all directions). The mind always initiates an action regardless of whether or not the body is required to move. If the co-ordination between mind and body is sound then the response in bodily functions, internal and external, will also be sound since strong Ki is allowed to flow. To obtain good co-ordination we

must have a calm mind. That is, the mind must not be full of doubt and self-defeating worry. It must think positively with non-aggression.

As the mind controls the body, and the body is the shadow of the mind, a calm mind controls a calm and stable body. The body responds by being relaxed and assumes a comfortable natural posture. This relaxation is not a limp state that we often think of as relaxation, but a powerful state. Even though the muscles still function if they are being called upon to do so, they are soft and operate with efficiency and power. If the muscles are allowed to tense, then the flow of Ki is impeded and bodily movement is impaired

When we lift something that weighs only a few ounces, our mind will initiate the action and our body will respond by performing the task in a confident relaxed fashion. However, when the weight is perceived to be above our lifting capability we sometimes tense our muscles because we doubt our ability to lift it. This fear, and the resulting muscular tension, only makes the task more difficult. Muscular tension, whether or not through self doubt, should always be avoided since it blocks the Ki in the same way that a dam blocks the flow of the river.

Sensei Williams

The Founder Of Aikido – Morihei Ueshiba “O Sensei”

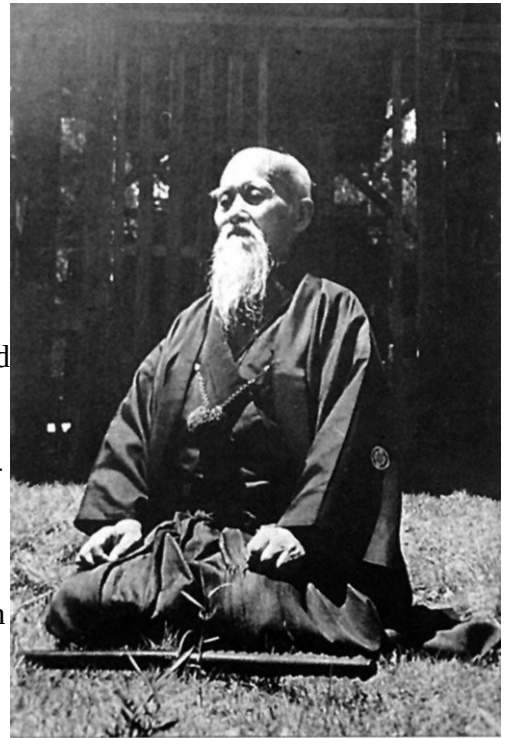
Morihei Ueshiba O-Sensei

The founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba, was born on December 14 1883, to a farming family in Tanabe.

From his father he inherited a samurai's determination and interest in public affairs, and from his mother an intense interest in religion, poetry and art.

In his early childhood, Morihei was rather weak and sickly, but he loved to listen to the legends of the wonder-working saints and was fascinated by the esoteric Buddhist rituals. His father would recount the tales of his great-grandfather, said to be one of the strongest samurai of his day, and encouraged him to study Sumo-wrestling and swimming.

School bored him, as his nervous energy needed a more practical outlet. He took on several jobs, but they too seemed to disillusion him. He realised he had an affinity for the martial arts, and greatly enjoyed his study of Jujutsu and Swordsmanship. But a severe case of Beri-Beri sent him home, where he later married.



After regaining his health he decided to enlist in the army. Standing at just under five feet tall, he failed to meet the minimum height requirements. He was so upset that he went immediately to the forests and swung on trees trying desperately to stretch his body out. On his next attempt to enlist, he passed his examination, becoming an infantryman in 1903.

During this time he impressed his superiors so much that a commanding officer recommended him for the National Military Academy, but he declined the position and resigned from active duty.

Morihei returned home to the farm. Having grown strong during his time in the military, he was now eager to continue physical training. His father built a Dojo on his farm and invited a well-known Jujutsu instructor to tutor him. During this time he found he possessed great skills.

In the spring of 1912, at the age of 29, he and his family moved to Hokkaido. During this time he met Takeda Sokaku, grand master of Daito-ryu Aikijutsu. After finding himself no match for his teacher, Morihei seemed to forget everything else and threw himself into training. He went back to Shirataki, built a Dojo, and invited Takeda to live there. However, upon hearing of his father's serious illness, Morihei sold off most of his property and left the Dojo to Takeda, never to return.

On his journey home, he impulsively stopped in Ayabe, headquarters for the new Omoto-kyo religion. Here he met the master of the new religion, Deguchi Onisaburo. He stayed three additional days.

Upon returning home, he found that he had stayed away too long; his father had passed away. Morihei took his father's death very hard, sold off all his ancestral land and moved to Ayabe to study Omoto-kyo. For the next eight years he studied with Deguchi Onisaburo, taught Budo, and headed up the local fire brigade.

A pacifist, Deguchi was an advocate of non-violent resistance and universal disarmament. He was noted to have said, “Armament and war are the means by which the landlords and capitalists make their profit, while the poor suffer”.

It did not take long for Deguchi to realise that Ueshiba's purpose on earth was “to teach the real meaning of Budo: an end to all fighting and contention”.

The study of Omoto-kyo and his association with Onisaburo profoundly affected Morihei's life. He once stated that while Takeda Sokaku opened his eyes to the essence of Budo, his enlightenment came from his Omoto-kyo experiences.

During his early 40's he had several spiritual experiences which so impressed him that his life and training were forever changed. He realised the true purpose of Budo was love that cherishes and nourishes all beings. In 1927, Deguchi Onisaburo encouraged him to separate from Omoto-kyo and begin his own way, so he moved to Tokyo.

Morihei's following grew, and he built a formal Dojo in the city. While the Dojo was being constructed, many high-ranking instructors of other arts came to visit. They were so impressed that they would dispatch their own students to study under him. He also held special classes for the major military and police academies.

In 1942, supposedly because of a divine command, he returned to the farmlands, moving to the village of Iwama where he built an outdoor Dojo and the now famous Aiki Shrine. He often said “Budo and farming are one”.

Iwama is considered by many to be the birth place of modern-day Aikido. Prior to this move, his system had been called Aikijutsu, then Aiki-Budo. Still primarily a martial art rather than a spiritual path.

From 1942, (when the name Aikido was first formally used) to 1952, Ueshiba consolidated the techniques and perfected the religious philosophy of Aikido.

After the war, Aikido grew rapidly. Morihei Ueshiba had become famous as “O-Sensei” or “The Grand Teacher”, the “Master of Aikido”. He had also received many decorations from the Japanese government. Right up to the end of his life, O-Sensei refined and improved his “Way”, never losing his dedication for hard training.

In early Spring 1969, O-Sensei fell ill and told his son, “God is calling me ...”.

He was returned to his home at his request to be near his Dojo. As his students made their last calls, he gave his final instructions. “Aikido is for the entire world. Train not for selfish reasons, but for all people everywhere”.

Early on the morning of April 26th 1969 before passing away, the 86 year old O-Sensei took his son's hand, smiled and said, “take care of things”.

Every year a memorial service is held on April 29th at the Aiki Shrine in Iwama.

How Aikido Training Saved Me (a short article by Sensei Aitkenhead)

It was a damp wet, dusky September evening in Clarkston, Glasgow. In 1995 I returned to full time education as a mature student and, that evening, was returning home on my motor cycle.

I noticed a junction on my left where a car pulled up. It appeared to stop and I assumed the driver had seen me. But no! Just as I passed the junction the car pulled out. I heard the sound of crushing metal, then of rushing air. I flew over the bonnet of the car at 30 miles per hour. Luckily, my instinct was not to put out my arms to break the fall. Instead, curled up in a ball, I rolled up the road several times over. I eventually settled to a stop. The other traffic stopped and I heard a doctor telling me not to move. Then, accompanied by the sound of sirens, I was off to hospital. My x-rays were all clear. No broken bones anywhere – to the amazement of the hospital staff. Not a scratch on my crash helmet and the flask in my rucksack still intact. I just had a bruise on my left leg, where it had collided with the car.

The hospital staff said I was very lucky. The real luck was that I practice Aikido. I had learned how to make ukemi and do an Aikido roll. Sadly, my motor cycle was not so lucky – it was a write off.

Sensei Ian Aitkenhead

Poole and Bournemouth Club

Aikido On A Train by Sensei Terry Dobson

(Terry Dobson was a direct student of the founder of Aikido and one of his few American students)

THE TRAIN CLANKED and rattled through the suburbs of Tokyo on a drowsy spring afternoon. Our car was comparatively empty - a few housewives with their kids in tow, some old folks going shopping. I gazed absently at the drab houses and dusty hedgerows.

At one station the doors opened, and suddenly the afternoon quiet was shattered by a man bellowing violent, incomprehensible curses. The man staggered into our car. He wore laborer's clothing, and he was big, drunk, and dirty. Screaming, he swung at a woman holding a baby. The blow sent her spinning into the laps of an elderly couple. It was a miracle that she was unharmed.

Terrified, the couple jumped up and scrambled toward the other end of the car. The laborer aimed a kick at the retreating back of the old woman but missed as she scuttled to safety. This so enraged the drunk that he grabbed the metal pole in the center of the car and tried to wrench it out of its stanchion. I could see that one of his hands was cut and bleeding. The train lurched ahead, the passengers frozen with fear. I stood up.

I was young then, some 20 years ago, and in pretty good shape. I'd been putting in a solid eight hours of Aikido training nearly every day for the past three years. I like to throw and grapple. I thought I was tough. Trouble was, my martial skill was untested in actual combat. As students of Aikido, we were not allowed to fight.

"Aikido," my teacher had said again and again, "is the art of reconciliation. Whoever has the mind to fight has broken his connection with the universe. If you try to dominate people, you are already defeated. We study how to resolve conflict, not how to start it."

I listened to his words. I tried hard I even went so far as to cross the street to avoid the chimpira, the pinball punks who lounged around the train stations. My forbearance exalted me. I felt both tough and holy. In my heart, however, I wanted an absolutely legitimate opportunity whereby I might save the innocent by destroying the guilty.

This is it! I said to myself, getting to my feet. People are in danger and if I don't do something fast, they will probably get hurt.

Seeing me stand up, the drunk recognized a chance to focus his rage. "Aha!" He roared. "A foreigner! You need a lesson in Japanese manners!"

I held on lightly to the commuter strap overhead and gave him a slow look of disgust and dismissal. I planned to take this turkey apart, but he had to make the first move. I wanted him mad, so I pursed my lips and blew him an insolent kiss.

"All right! He hollered. "You're gonna get a lesson." He gathered himself for a rush at me.

A split second before he could move, someone shouted "Hey!" It was earsplitting. I remember the strangely joyous, lilting quality of it - as though you and a friend had been searching diligently for something, and he suddenly stumbled upon it. "Hey!"

I wheeled to my left; the drunk spun to his right. We both stared down at a little old Japanese. He must have been well into his seventies, this tiny gentleman, sitting there immaculate in his kimono. He took no notice of me, but beamed delightedly at the laborer, as though he had a most important, most welcome secret to share.

"C'mere," the old man said in an easy vernacular, beckoning to the drunk. "C'mere and talk with me." He waved his hand lightly.

The big man followed, as if on a string. He planted his feet belligerently in front of the old gentleman, and roared above the clacking wheels, "Why the hell should I talk to you?" The drunk now had his back to me. If his elbow moved so much as a millimeter, I'd drop him in his socks.

The old man continued to beam at the laborer.

"What'cha been drinkin'?" he asked, his eyes sparkling with interest. "I been drinkin' sake," the laborer bellowed back, "and it's none of your business!" Flecks of spittle spattered the old man.

"Ok, that's wonderful," the old man said, "absolutely wonderful! You see, I love sake too. Every night, me and my wife (she's 76, you know), we warm up a little bottle of sake and take it out into the garden, and we sit on an old wooden bench. We watch the sun go down, and we look to see how our persimmon tree is doing. My great-grandfather planted that tree, and we worry about whether it will recover from those ice storms we had last winter. Our tree had done better than I expected, though especially when you consider the poor quality of the soil. It is gratifying to watch when we take our sake and go out to enjoy the evening - even when it rains!" He looked up at the laborer, eyes twinkling.

As he struggled to follow the old man's conversation, the drunk's face began to soften. His fists slowly unclenched. "Yeah," he said. "I love persimmons too..." His voice trailed off.

"Yes," said the old man, smiling, "and I'm sure you have a wonderful wife."

"No," replied the laborer. "My wife died." Very gently, swaying with the motion of the train, the big man began to sob. "I don't got no wife, I don't got no home, I don't got no job. I am so ashamed of myself." Tears rolled down his cheeks; a spasm of despair rippled through his body.

Now it was my turn. Standing there in well-scrubbed youthful innocence, my make-this-world-safe-for-democracy righteousness, I suddenly felt dirtier than he was.

Then the train arrived at my stop. As the doors opened, I heard the old man cluck sympathetically. "My, my," he said, "that is a difficult predicament, indeed. Sit down here and tell me about it."

I turned my head for one last look. The laborer was sprawled on the seat, his head in the old man's lap. The old man was softly stroking the filthy, matted hair.

As the train pulled away, I sat down on a bench. What I had wanted to do with muscle had been accomplished with kind words. I had just seen Aikido tried in combat, and the essence of it was love. I would have to practice the art with an entirely different spirit. It would be a long time before I could speak about the resolution of conflict.

Terry Dobson

Sensei Henry Ellis's Story About Abbe Sensei First Meeting O Sensei

Sensei Henry Ellis is one of the original Aikido practitioners in the UK. This story comes from an interview with him. The question is about his teacher Abbe Sensei.

Interviewer: I know that Abbe Sensei told you how he first came to Aikido - would you mind recounting that particular story?

Sensei Henry Ellis: I'd be happy to. Abbe Sensei was All Japan Judo Champion at the age of 18, prior to World War II. He told me that he was rather arrogant at that time, having achieved fame so young.

Anyway, it was during a train journey in Japan that he first met O'Sensei. Abbe didn't know who he was and he reacted to Ueshiba Sensei looking at him, saying: "What are you staring at, old man?" Ueshiba replied: "I know who you are". to which Abbe modestly retorted: "Everyone knows me, I am Kenshiro Abbe, Champion of All Japan".

O'Sensei then introduced himself as the Founder of Aikido, and was told by Abbe that he didn't look strong enough to be a Martial Arts Master. O'Sensei then offered Abbe his little finger, and said: "But young man, you look very strong indeed. Please break my finger".

Abbe at first declined, but eventually accepted the challenge, presumably to shut this old man up. Abbe Sensei told me that, as he took hold of the old man's finger and tried to break it, he found himself on the floor of the carriage and totally immobilised. Whilst on the floor, Abbe asked the Founder for permission to study under him. This is my understanding of Abbe Sensei's story.

A Strange Aikido Story by Sensei Ronnie Smith

People often ask about whether Aikido can be used to defend yourself in real life. For me, the value in Aikido practise goes beyond that to where it can be used in situations every day. Often Aikido training helps to avoid confrontations before they escalate.

One such situation comes to mind from a Christmas night out many years ago. But, I have to warn you, this is a bit weird and hard to believe!

I used to work in a team at the HMRC in Glasgow. There were maybe 12 of us and we had went on a Christmas night out.

We ended up at a place called Sloan's in the centre of Glasgow.

I did not feel comfortable there from the moment we walked in. This is unusual for me. It seems I usually end up in good environments. I like to imagine that as I am always trying to extend positive ki into the world that this leads me to good places to be.

I looked around the room and was aware of a few groups in the pub that seemed like they could be a problem. There were two tables in particular that stood out. One was a table of 3 men that instantly caught my attention. My feeling was that they were looking for a fight. Once again, that is rarely something I sense from people but this night it appeared to be the case.

At one point in the night, one of these men came over to one of my colleagues and began to make fun of him. It seemed like nothing much at first but the man just would not stop and it was clearly starting to intimidate my colleague.

Funnily enough, a few weeks before I had been in an almost identical situation with my friend Gareth in a chip shop. In that scenario Gareth had had a really bad day and a man in the chip shop starting to make fun of him out of the blue (despite the fact that Gareth is 6'3 and built like a rugby player). Clearly Gareth was not comfortable but was not sure who to respond.

I sensed that in that situation, the man did not have violent intentions. I calmly walked over to him and asked him politely but firmly not to continue to pick on my friend as he had not had a good day. The man apologised and said he did not mean to cause offence. We accepted the apology and it went no further.

I remember that Gareth told me that he thought the man would have retaliated and become violent. But I could feel that he did not have that intention at all despite his behaviour. In Aikido training, we aim to "know our partner's mind".

Back to Sloan's...

I considered intervening in a similar way in the situation at Sloan's but this time it seemed to me this would almost certainly lead to a confrontation. This man was looking for any excuse and could explode any minute it seemed.

I decided to try an unusual experiment.

I stood at he bar and decided to visualise that I was extending ki into the room. This was not something I had ever really tried before but for some reason the idea came to me in that moment.

I must have stood there for a few minutes doing this and who knows what people around me thought.

Well, you may or may not believe this but after a while I looked up and noticed that the feeling in the room had completely changed.

The 3 men that seemed like they were looking for a fight had disappeared and never returned that night. Not only that but the other table that seemed to be upsetting the atmosphere of the room had also gone.

Perhaps that was just a coincidence? Or maybe our ki does have an influence on the people and the environments around us.

If that is the case, we should always be careful in what energy we are sending out there. We should endeavour to keep sending out our positive intentions and positive ki into the world.

About Sensei Ronnie Smith

“Do you want to try Aikido?”

I turned round to see John the Butcher standing at the end of the aisle. This was a completely out of the blue request but strangely enough I was open to it....

A few years earlier I had some friends that practised Ninjutsu (the martial art of the Ninja). I remembered being in the Borders bookshop in town while one of those friends was looking to buy a martial arts book as a gift for his brother. He was looking at an Aikido book and showed me pictures of the founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba. He spoke enthusiastically about Aikido.

In my childhood I always loved the idea of practising a martial art, but perhaps coming from a big family it was outside of the ability of my parents to commit to the time or finances to go to such a class. My dad had at one point practised karate but never seemed interested in showing us what he had learned. Instead myself and my brothers would rent out WWF wrestling videos from the local video shop and attempt to emulate the moves (that we were warned against trying to emulate).

By a strange coincidence, John the Butcher had practised Karate with my uncle Terry and my cousins. Perhaps this was why he asked me to go along to Aikido with him. Maybe he thought a desire to practice martial arts ran in the family?

I arranged to go along with him and we were picked up by car by John's friend Russell. It turned out I recognised Russell as he was always in Morrisons. His wife worked there and he must have lived nearby.

My first class....

When we got to the class, at Kelvin Hall, I looked into the dojo only to see another familiar face. The first student I saw in the room was Ashby, who had been the science technician at the high school I had attended. It seemed like a strange coincidence and coincidences often make me think I am in the right place.

At the class I met my teacher Sensei Richard Firestone, who I still train with to this day. In the class he demonstrated the power of the martial art and taught us about the principles of Ki. The concept of Ki can be a hard one to grasp for many people but I was very open to it.

I began practising meditation not long before attending the class and was curious about the concept of internal development and energy. I have always had an interest in the esoteric and mystical side of life.



I joined the class not long after and have continued to study the art to this day. I was awarded my 1st Dan Black Belt by Sensei William Andrew 8th Dan after around 4 years of training. Sensei Andrew sadly passed away less than a month after I achieved my black belt. I have since been awarded my 2nd and 3rd Dan Black Belts from Sensei Edward Dunne (7th Dan).

I have personally found that training in Aikido has had many great benefits. It has improved my confidence and reduced my fear and anxiety in the world to almost zero.

Can you imagine walking alone at night, in the “bad” parts of town and having no stress and no worries?

This is not because I have become an invincible fighter through Aikido but actually because I learned that my fears were an illusion and based on a false idea I had of the world.

Of course, I do believe I can defend and take care of myself much more than I could have before training but in truth I have never had to use the physical side of Aikido. I have however been able to remain calm and controlled in confrontations and this has allowed me to avoid fighting or being attacked. With training, I believe you start to exude a greater confidence that makes you less of a target in the world.

Physically I have improved in balance, co-ordination and self-awareness. Aikido training teaches us to become more centred in our movements and to co-ordinate our body to move from our “one point”, a point in the lower abdomen below the belly button which is our centre of gravity (and in some traditions the centre from which our “life force” emanates).

Aikido training has also taught me to be able to fall without hurting myself too much. There are numerous stories of Aikido practitioners coming off of motorbikes and being able to use Aikido break falls to survive without almost no injury.

Aikido has helped me to develop a more positive attitude to life and has helped me feel more comfortable in my own skin.

We train not only to centre our body but also to learn to centre our mind.

Do you ever find yourself getting caught up in your own head? Are you endlessly distracted by racing thoughts? Are you plagued with fears, worries and anxieties about your past and future?

I find that the training we offer helps to bring our awareness back into our body and into our centre or “one point”. This allows us more and more to live in the moment and allows us to feel more free to act and respond effectively to the challenges around us without getting overwhelmed by them.

Why Practise with Sensei Ronnie Smith?

Here is a little about me:

I was born in 1984, and I have been practising Aikido in Glasgow for 14 years under the tuition of Sensei Richard Firestone 4th Dan. I am from Irish and Scottish descent mostly, my grandfather on my mother’s side comes from Donegal, Ireland. My grandparents on my father’s side were from the Isle of Lewis. I attended Sir John Maxwell Primary in Pollokshaws, Glasgow which had a Gaelic unit at the time and I speak pretty good Gaelic.

I grew up having a love for many sports. A little later on I developed a great passion for music after picking up my first guitar age 10. My dreams of rock stardom have not quite manifested (yet) but I have played all over the UK in bands. I studied Law at university but never found a traineeship to go further in that career. Funnily enough, the only interview I got for a legal traineeship was with a man who asked me about Aikido (as it was in my CV). I think that was the only reason he brought me in for the interview. I later found out he was looking for a class to join (he was at that time running the Glasgow Zen Meditation group, which was funny as my mum had told me to take “meditation” off of my CV as one of my interests!).

I worked in a variety of retail and civil service jobs before eventually starting my business which is an international raw vegan festival called UK Fruitfest. This event has been held in England for the last 10 years. I have a great interest in health and wellness throughout my life and have travelled the world to learn from great teachers about nutrition and healthy living. I have been practising a 100% raw vegan diet for around 10 years.

I believe that Aikido is an excellent way to continue to develop the body and mind throughout life and I am committed to continuing to practise and develop Aikido. I believe through the practise of Aikido we can learn to be better people and deal with confrontation and stress in a more effective way.

Why Not Come Along And Try Aikido?

You can come along for a visit to the class at Palace Of Art, Glasgow. It takes place on Monday nights at 7.30pm.

If you would like to contact me prior to coming along you can do so here:

Email: aikidoforglasgow@gmail.com

Phone/Text/Whatsapp: 07936 875 064

Book a time to speak with me on my calendar: <http://calendly.com/fruitfest/aikido>