

The Best warrior is never aggressive, the best fighter is never angry.

- Loa Tsu, Tao Te Ching

The Art of Peace does not rely on weapons or brute force to succeed; instead we put ourselves in tune with the universe, maintain peace in our own realms, nurture life, and prevent death and destruction.

The true meaning of the term *samurai* is one who serves and adheres to the power of love.

- Morihei Ueshiba

The first time, I became aware of Aikido was in the late 60's when I was just a kid. I remember reading a very brief description of the different martial arts in a newspaper, and although I had no clue how to pronounce Aikido, the synopsis went something like this: Aikido, a Japanese martial art used to defeat an attacker without harming them. Wow, I thought how was that possible? I couldn't image how you could defend yourself without using force like a strike, blow, kick or punch. At the time, my only frame of reference for martial arts had been what I had been exposed to via popular culture. There was Barney Phife (Don Knotts), from "*The Andy Griffith Show*", whose hands were registered as lethal weapons because of his deadly "judo chops." There was the cool Mrs. Peel (Diana Rigg), from "*The Avengers*" and the even cooler Kato (Bruce Lee) from the "*Green Hornet*." Both of them dressed in black, and executing major damage on the bad guys, with their martial arts skills. In the movies and on television, the hero would often incapacitate someone with a single karate blow to the neck, or a punch to the jaw. Of course, all of this is possible, but less common than entertainment would have us believe. From John Wayne to James Bond martial arts were used to kick butt. I hadn't seen, or was aware of any philosophical or spiritual underpinning to their construct. That is until "*Kung Fu*", with David Carradine, hit the airwaves, and the first time I saw Kurosawa's "*Shichinin no Samurai*" at the "Little Art Theatre" here in Yellow Springs, Ohio. Both impacted me and changed my previous assumptions about the martial arts. I began to realize that they might have a deeper purpose than I originally suspected.

By the time, I was eighteen I joined a tai kwan do club. The club was steeped in machismo. I would overhear conversations, between some of the students, who bragged about going to bars looking for fights to test their martial skills. Once while sparring with a higher ranking student, I was punched in the throat by him, and he was completely unapologetic. Lucky for me, I was at a far enough distance from him that the punch caused me no serious harm. But that was the last straw. I quit and never looked back. As a side note, let me be clear so I don't offend those who practice tai kwan do. I don't believe this club was a good example of what tai kwan do represents as a martial art or martial philosophy. I just found myself in bad situation inside a bad martial arts club.

I eventually, joined the United State Navy with some intention to see Japan, a country I had always wanted to visit. However that realization never materialized. I had a friend and co-worker, who had studied martial arts as a kid, and joined the navy with the same intention as myself. His hopes, unlike mine came to fruition about two years before I met him. He had the opportunity to train in karate and ninjitsu, and learned some Japanese while stationed in Japan. We would often train after work. He showed me some rolls, strikes and joint locks. One day while we were talking he told me I should study aikido, that it would suit my personality. I had no idea what he meant or even what aikido looked like. He later gave me John Stevens, "*Aikido: Way of Harmony*" and that was the first time I had "seen" aikido. After my enlistment was up, I left the navy and I lost contact with Kyle, but his comment has always stuck in my mind.

I tried Shotokan karate for awhile, but it just didn't "feel" right. It wasn't until I started college at Cleveland State University that I met Jonathan Smith. Sensei Smith taught aikido 101 at the university, and although I didn't need the credit, I took his class and I was hooked. Sensei Smith was a big, burly bear of a man, but despite his physique, he moved effortlessly and gracefully when on the mat. I was amazed at what I was witnessing. After taking his class the third time in a row, Sensei was gracious enough to let me continue training without paying the expensive university fee. Through his class, I met other people in the Cleveland aikido community, and began training at a dojo associated with

Saotome's *Aikido School of Ueshiba*. After practicing aikido, for about two years, my job took me out of the Cleveland area, and I stopped training for the next five years. When I moved back to my home town, I was surprised to find an aikido dojo within 20 minutes drive from my apartment.

I've been training at "*Yellow Springs Aikido*," now over six years, under the excellent instruction of Michael McVey Sensei. We are a small dojo, which gives us an advantage, and the privilege for receiving very direct and personalized teaching from Mike Sensei. Although, we are far from the CAA, Pat Hendricks Sensei has had several seminars in Yellow Springs over the years; and I and other Yellow Springs students have traveled and trained at dojos across the country. We have been fortunate enough, due largely to our approximation to Wright Patterson Air Force Base, to have students pass through our doors from Austria, Israel, Yugoslavia, Turkey, France, Japan and from all over the U.S. We have and had high ranking students train with us, who have studied other styles of aikido, and others who have trained in Tokyo and Okinawa.

I love aikido for what it's brought to my life. I have met and made many friends while practicing aikido and I feel fortunate for having them as training partners. Through aikido, I have been introduced to, and now practice yoga and meditation which have also expanded my awareness, and increased my flexibility. I enjoy the completeness of aikido, and how it integrates mind, body and spirit. In many ways, aikido has opened me to a fuller and more vibrant way of living; and who knows; maybe if I find myself in an inescapable dangerous situation, I'll be able to kick some butt too?

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