

"Why Aikido"

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Let me relate an incident that was very significant for me. One day I walked into my home and found a burglar there. To make a long story short, I pinned him and held him for the police. (By the way, for those of you who are interested I switched pins several times and discovered that when working with uncooperative partners, a sankyo pin works quite well. It eliminates all the squirming around and other nonsense of them trying to get up). The significance of the story is this. In the following weeks I discussed the foiled burglary with many people and was amazed at how many expressed the opinion that I should have used the opportunity to get in a few extra "hits" on the scoundrel. I am pleased to say that the thought of doing that never even occurred to me. My training in Aikido has taught me many things but one thing it has not taught me is to think of others as "the enemy". For me this is essential and it is why I have chosen Aikido as the martial art that is most appropriate for me.

I agree with those who say that Aikido is a "metaphor for life". I wish to live my life in a way that transcends hate and I prefer to train in a manner consistent with that ideal. Further, I do not agree that harmonious cooperative Aikido is ineffective on belligerent individuals. My experience has taught me otherwise. For years I worked in a hospital where there were no security guards and I was called upon many times to help the staff deal with hostile situations. I consistently found that it was possible to diffuse situations by getting the angry person to focus on me. Then I would simply close my openings. I believe because I did not perceive these people as "the enemy" that they were able to restore their own harmony once there was no longer a target for their conflict. My training has allowed me on many occasions to transcend violence rather than to defeat an opponent.

Can we use Aikido techniques for self defense? To me this is like asking whether you can use a mint condition convertible automobile to haul gravel. Of course you could, but why not use a pickup truck instead? If someone's main motivation is to learn self defense they should take a self defense class. I teach self defense at a local university and I also teach Aikido in our local dojo. They are not the same. In self defense classes we discuss avoidance and issues such as acquaintance rape, spouse abuse and armed robbery plus some martial techniques. Physical techniques are only one small part of self defense. The most effective self defense techniques are the ones that require no martial arts since the conflict is avoided.

To sum up a discussion of which style of training is best, let me relay what a sensei once told me. If one person trains in a certain style of martial arts for ten years and another person trains in another style for ten years, neither of them is a match for a ten year old with a gun. Self defense is not the reason we train. Personally, I prefer to transcend conflict and train for harmony.