

The Intrinsic Value of Children's Aikido Classes to Aikido as a Whole

Part I

David B. Kai

California Aikido Association Yudansha Examination Requirement

Tom Davidson Sensei

1 August 2008

The Intrinsic Value of Children's Aikido Classes to Aikido as a Whole

Part I

As adults studying Aikido, participation in a children's Aikido class can only serve to better the overall person both as practitioners of Aikido and as human beings living within this global community. William Gleason stated that "Aikido is an intuitive study of human life" (23). It follows that in order to further expand this study of life; one should take every opportunity to involve oneself with a variety of training partners. It cannot be overlooked that "children are born by the will of the Universe" (Maruyama 15). As Mitsugi Saotome states, "We too easily forget our roots" (*xi*).

Some adults may argue that it is unnecessary to train in Aikido with Children as partners because they lack the strength to truly compete against an adult in a test of strength. Saotome states that "Aikido is not a sport" (245). Aikido is "the way of harmony and love" (Ueshiba 82). Aikido "requires that the student [young or old] respects the "natural" integrity of his [partner's] anatomy" (Westbrook and Ratti 49). With these notions in mind, adults can begin to open themselves to the idea that we have much to learn from children. As time passes working with younger students, "one loses all sense of knowing anything: all skillfulness is gone. There is no difference between oneself and anyone else" (Gleason 16).

Many adults naturally shy away from participating in a children's Aikido class due to the fear that it is too difficult to adapt techniques and that someone will get hurt. Gleason states that "the main emphasis of aikido training should be on control" (24). "Aikido does not, in other words, advocate the employment of intrinsic or total energy in a way which breaks those laws [the natural laws of creation] by seriously injuring or destroying another man [or in this case a child]" (Westbrook and Ratti 86). Yes, if one is to understand that "when the wrist is placed in

the Nikyo position (maximal palmarflexion with simultaneous ulnar deviation), the two bones are forcibly compressed,” and this compression is not ideal for the overall developmental growth of a child, then yes, one must accept that there are certain limitations with which a children’s Aikido class must be constrained (Eckert and Lee 709). It is not the intention of a children’s Aikido class to cause such things as “degenerative changes of the pisotriquetral joint, likely due to the chronic application of Nikyo” (Eckert and Lee 711). Adult Aikido practitioners must adhere to the notion that “they will leave no serious injury in their wake.” (Westbrook and Ratti 19). With this in mind, training with children allows practitioners “the ability to adjust appropriately and train with everyone [...] a good example of the effective application of aiki principle” (Hofmeister Ukemi).

Hiroshi Ikeda noted that Mushin means “being without preconceived notions, plans, opinions, or emotion” (Question). “Birth and death are notions. They are not real.” (Nhat Hanh 4). Similarly, “if you get caught in one idea and consider it to be “the truth,” then you miss the chance to know the truth” (Nhat Hanh 11). Koretoshi Maruyama stated that “one must change negative thoughts into positive thoughts” (Maruyama 19). In this same light, adult practitioners must open their hearts and minds to the notion that they have much to learn from practicing with children. Kisshomaru Ueshiba noted that he “could not help being impressed by the sincerity and earnestness shown in practice by younger people” (52). “Change is life, and the ability to change is the essential element of growth” (Saotome 23). As Aikido continues to be taught in this ever-changing world, it is “from the children that the spirit of harmony and true love [that is] essential for teaching aikido” can continue to blossom (Ueshiba 53).

Works Cited

- Eckert, Jordan, and Ta-Kwong Lee. "The Anatomy of Nikyo (Aikido's Second Teaching)." Perceptual and Motor Skills 77 (1993): 707-715.
- Gleason, William. The Spiritual Foundations of Aikido. Vermont: Destiny Books, 1995.
- Hofmeister, Tres. "Ukemi." Bujin Newsletter 4 (2000): n. pag. On-line. Internet. 7 April, 2004. Available: http://www.bujindesign.com/training_tips/ukemi_1.html.
- Ikeda, Hiroshi. "A Question About Aikido Philosophy." Bujin Newsletter 4 (2000): n. pag. On-line. Internet. 7 April, 2004. Available: http://www.bujindesign.com/featured_articles/2000_5_article_3.htm.
- Maruyama, Koretoshi. Aikido with Ki. New York: Kodansha International, 1984.
- Nhat Hanh, Thich. No death, no fear: comforting wisdom for life. New York: Riverhead Books, 2002.
- Saotome, Mitsugi. Aikido and the Harmony of Nature. Boston: Shambhala, 1993.
- Ueshiba, Kisshomaru. The Spirit of Aikido. Trans. Taitetsu Unno. New York: Kodansha International, 1984.
- Westbrook, A., and O. Ratti. Aikido and the Dynamic Sphere: An Illustrated Introduction. Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 1970.