

Aikido in Three Easy Lessons

Richard Moon

Lesson One: Feel Where You Are (centering, balance)

Lesson Two: Harmonious Relationship. The essence of Aikido is non-resistance. Align with the situation as it unfolds. Move in concert.

Lesson Three: Share Who You Are

2. Harmonious Relationship.

The second principle is harmonious relationship. This is a state of engaged non-resistance. Non-resistance means moving in concert with experience, accepting your feelings and the feelings of others. Harmonious relationship means adapting to change by aligning with the situation as it unfolds.

In the physical practice of Aikido, when someone attacks, representing the force of change, we don't resist the force. We don't stay on the line of the attack in opposition to the energy, limited to being pushed or pushing back. Instead, we enter in next to the attacker, turn and face in the same direction and try to understand his point of view.

Harmonious relationship positions us to work together creatively. If another reacts negatively to a suggestion, don't oppose their reaction to try to convince them otherwise. Enter into an inquiry together. Receive their reaction as guidance towards a creative solution. Work with them to improve the suggestion.

When energy isn't lost to friction or opposition, all our attention is free to generate solutions and positive action. This is difficult when we are opposed to that which is, just as it is difficult to be heard by someone who is talking.

An exploration...

Take a quiet moment to settle yourself. Taking simple notes about your experience may help you see the changes in your perceptions over time.

Bring your attention to your breathing. Feel the breath moving in and out of your lungs. This is called 'external' breathing. Using your imagination, feel the breath moving through you and sense the oxygen being absorbed at a cellular level. This is called 'internal' breathing. Feel where the oxygen becomes a glow of energy. Notice the areas where it doesn't. Maintain this focus of attention for a few moments. See what you notice.

Now focus your attention on your physical sensations. Feel where you are tight; feel where you are relaxed. Feel where you are emotionally. Notice the quality and tone of your thinking. Feel where your energy is flowing freely and where there is resistance to the flow of life energy. Then expand this awareness into the whole of your life. Feel the quality and tone of your relationships, with people, your work, and your involvement in the world.

Feel where you are in the whole of creation. Though this directive challenges the linear mind, the exercise is a simple one for the imagination. Start there.

Grounding frees awareness and allows the intelligent use of energy. In connecting with the earth is the recognition that we are part of a larger system. We do not exist in isolation. We don't float in empty space because the support and gravity of the earth hold us in place. This support signifies the expansive field of sustenance the universe offers, including the energy of sunlight and the vitality of our biosphere which produces the oxygen we breathe and the food we eat. We are interacting with the energy of the whole of creation. We are interacting with the force of creation that is creating us. We are Creation.

Grounding ourselves awakens us as active participants in the unfolding of Creation. In the process of grounding, the universal power flows through and into our lives. With practice, grounding increases our ability to consciously draw on this power.

When we are startled we get up-tight, our shoulders come up and our muscles tighten. We disconnect from the earth and resist the flow of energy through our system. As soon as we focus attention on feeling where we are, the natural intelligence of the living system begins to correct without effort. Attending to feeling the breath along with feeling the state of tension in the body allows the system to self-organize continually. The absence of feeling diminishes the process. Feeling gives birth to movement.

An exploration

As you focus your attention on feeling where you are, shift attention from your thoughts to feeling your body. Tightening and releasing the muscles of the whole body is the simplest, most tangible way to draw attention to feeling. As you continue to pay attention to feeling it becomes easily apprehendable and accessible.

Straighten your posture; then exhale softly and settle into yourself. Sense the pull of gravity down into the earth. Notice where you resist gravity, holding your weight up through the tension of your muscles. Feel your weight sink down into your hips or feet. Exhale slowly and feel your muscles relax. Sense the weight of your body pouring through your bones and settling through the floor into the earth, dispersing throughout the earth's mass. Feel the support of ground, being connected deeply into the earth.

Standing or sitting, rock gently left and right, diminishing the movement gradually until you come to rest at Center. How did you recognize Center? How did you know where to stop?

- a. It felt right.
- b. I relaxed.
- c. My breath released.
- d. I felt more stable.
- e. I had more energy.

- f. My attention became clear and sharp.
- g. I felt a sense of readiness or capability.
- h. I felt heavier.
- i. All of the above.

When you are centered notice how your weight is transferred naturally and effortlessly through your bones, to the earth, to Ground. This focus of attention changes and deepens your experience of Center and Ground. This in turn changes your relationship to the universe.

Grounding is like breathing. Once in the morning is not enough. If you practice on a regular basis, you will be able to use this technique anytime you are in a threatening or disturbing situation. Train yourself the second you start to panic to feel where you are. As your attention focuses on experiencing your essential self, you connect to the vitality of life. This brings you in touch with what is going on in the present moment and enhances your capacity for action. You naturally know what to do next. Feeling gives birth to movement.

Your physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual energies inform and shape events which become history. In feeling where you are the essence of who you are awakens. Attention effortlessly connects to the whole and senses what needs to change in your life.

The Art of Awareness

Moving from a centered state is important not simply for doing techniques in the Aikido practice hall. It is for living your life. Center doesn't just mean the little area just below the navel. Being centered includes the center of your mind, the center of your heart, the center of your being, the center of the earth, and the center of Creation.

2. Harmony.

The second principle is harmony. Harmony means non-resistance to the unfolding universe, accepting and receiving what is rather than opposing it. "Harmony" and "arm" both derive from a Greek root meaning "fitting" or "joining," as an arm fits or joins into the shoulder. Musically, harmony enriches the overtone series of two or more notes. A choir sings different parts in a harmonious relationship.

Harmony literally means to form a coherent, unified whole, free from fragmentation. The forces in a self-organizing system naturally seek a relationship of harmony. Science calls this tendency entrainment.

This interconnected state of being is at the heart of Aikido. Open, flexible, non-resistant, our field of perception is expanded: the more we open ourselves, the more we perceive. When we receive in an open state, we interact and relate in a harmonious relationship. Our actions are seen in relationship to the whole. Harmony produces a field of energy out of which emerges the potential for resolving conflict within any system.

Everything in the universe exists in relationship to other things. Everything is connected to everything else. Awareness of the whole transcends the limits of our

perception of time and space. We exist in relationship to the planet, to each other, to our thoughts, values, and perceptions, creating a universe of immense complexity and possibility. We create our world out of the state of being from which we operate. The spirit of Aikido opens a relationship of awareness and perception. Aikido refines the quality of our being as well as that of others and reveals and reconciles our inter-relatedness.

Moving in harmony with another begins with the first lesson: feeling who you are—being present and grounded, aware of your own experience. Coming into an inner coherence, unified in body, mind, and spirit, affects the tone and quality of any relationship. When you live in a state of dynamic presence, it allows the second principle of harmonious non-resistance to energy.

The secret of aikido is to harmonize ourselves with the movement of the universe and bring ourselves into accord with the universe itself.

Morihei Ueshiba O Sensei

The Power of Harmony

The science of physics teaches that resistance means the loss of energy to friction. When electricity is used to create light, resistance in the wires to the flow of electrons reduces electrical potential. The potential is diminished in the creation of heat instead of light. The lower the resistance, the more effective the system—the brighter the light. In electronic communications researchers seek superconductors to create systems with less resistance.

This dynamic of energy lost to friction is visible in the world of human relationships—among individuals, companies, and countries. Great power can be released through harmony, and this power can help humankind create harmonious relationships.

Aiki is not a technique to fight with or defeat the enemy. It is a way to reconcile the world and make human beings one family.

Morihei Ueshiba O Sensei

Life energy, when resisted, creates stress. Our efficiency and effectiveness diminish under stress. Tightness in the muscles inhibits the range and power of an athlete's motion just as tightness in the mind impedes an executive's ability to organize information and develop strategy. Resistance to one's own feelings and intentions blocks personal power and inhibits the leadership ability needed to guide and motivate ourselves and others.

When we are open and non-resistant to the flow of our own power, we generate an indomitable spirit. The word "spirit" defines the power of our intentions and the power of our attitudes. It refers to the indefinable energy that activates these forces. When a leader has a strong spirit the team feels energized and empowered by it.

The power of Aikido emanates from harmony. In the midst of change, do not oppose your feelings or the feelings of others. Start by accepting experience as it is, including your desire to change it.

Water by its nature shows us non-resistance, effortlessly taking the shape of the container into which it is poured. In an effective Aikido response, one aligns in harmony with the shape of an attack. Without opposing the incoming energy, one moves and responds with the unfolding situation.

In the physical practice of Aikido, when someone attacks us, representing the force of change, we do not resist the force. We don't stay on the line of the attack and engage in a power struggle. We enter into the situation beside the attacker; we turn and face the same direction. We try to understand their point of view. This action symbolizes the effort to learn and understand, to enter into harmony rather than expending our divine power of creation increasing defensive resistance.

Alfred Einstein and David Bohm, also a prominent physicist, belonged to a community of scientists whose most valuable capital was the ability to share in a common pool of intelligence and knowledge. The scientific community, when it works well, exemplifies the value of harmony in the search for knowledge and shows us the power unleashed in the ability to think together. A spirit of harmony and cooperation creates an environment for learning to flourish rather than one of dominance and fear.

Off the Line

Getting "off the line" is the first step in developing harmony. In the physical practice of Aikido, the term describes getting out of the way of an attack, a sword strike, a physical push, or a grab. The attack serves as a metaphor for any change or pressure in daily life, whether the intent is hostile or not. The pressure of the attack represents the pressure of daily life; time pressures, psychological and emotional stress, etc.

Getting off the line of attack is a powerful technique, especially when someone intends to cause you harm—physically, politically, or socially. If you are "not there" to receive the attack and your adversary can't land the punch he cannot harm you. If you get off the line, the energy you would have expended defending yourself is available for the creative process.

Moving off the line of attack can be described in an emotional context as "not taking it personally". Get off the line. Don't let another's interaction with you become a personal matter. Choose to receive it and understand the attacker's meaning as an expression of how he is feeling. Acceptance doesn't necessarily mean agreement. If you don't take another's response as an affront, you are free to engage in a genuine dialogue. You can seek creative solutions together instead of becoming entangled in negative or defensive arguments that leave you drained rather than vitalized and diminish the quality of the relationship.

Harmony positions one to work creatively together with another person, with a situation or a problem. When energy is not lost to resistance, all our attentiveness and awareness can be focused on generating solutions and creative action. If another person reacts negatively to a suggestion, don't challenge their reaction or try to change their point of view. Enter into an inquiry together. Use their input as guidance towards a creative solution. Work with them to improve the suggestion.

Harmony means embracing the life force; not fighting against it when it rushes in. This is the power of harmony—the essence of Aikido.

Aikido is non-resistance. As it is
Non-resistance, it is always victorious.

Never defeated means never fighting.

There is no discord in love. There is no enemy
of love. Love is the guardian deity of everything.
Nothing can exist without it.

Morihei Ueshiba O Sensei

Aikido mirrors life and reflects our styles and patterns of behavior. In physical training, our response to the person attacking us reveals how we respond to the pressures we face in life, whether dealing with the rent, taxes, old age, or dying.

Our relationship with the outer world reflects our relationship with our energy, our spirit. In training we develop a willingness to explore unknown aspects, which may seem foreign and uncomfortable. The person “attacking” us can be used as a metaphor to represent external forces we encounter as well as those we experience internally or psychologically.

Harmonizing with the attacker’s energy implies aligning ourselves to our own ki, our energy, our spirit, and enhances our ability to draw on and utilize that potential. Aikido practice opens up channels for universal ki and allows this energy to flow through into the creation of our lives. We practice harmony first with our own life energy.

In training we learn to align with ki and open to it instead of resisting it. Aligning at one level is fun; at another it is abject terror. When we learn to handle the ki within our own system effectively, we handle the ki in the world effectively.

3. Share Who You Are

The third principle is share who you are. Make your contribution. Accomplish your mission. Each of us has a unique view of the world. Each of us brings something special to share. All of us value making a contribution and having our contribution valued by others. How many times in a meeting have you had something of value to say and remained quiet? How many possible contributions have you held back?

Every innovation in business, every breakthrough in science, and every major transformation in art enriches the entire world; and yet virtually every new idea has its detractors. To quote Martha Graham, “It is not your business to determine how good

your (expression) is, nor how valuable, nor how it compares to other expressions. It is your business to keep the channel open.”

Your obligation is not only to be aware of “the urges that activate you” but to act on them. Produce an outcome, not simply the idea of it. Bring the idea into form, to fruition. Make your contribution. It might be said that keeping the channel open allows action. Going with the flow doesn’t mean hanging out passively around it.

Authenticity and Spontaneity

Life is not about handling pressure. It is about being truly who we are in the world. We lose touch with our mission when our spirit gets lost in the entanglements of daily life—all of the myriad forces that steal our attention from our own flow. Before we know it, our lives are consumed handling pressures and we no longer know who we are.

An wisdom exists in the universe and flows through us. The light of our awareness allows us to be moved by this internal voice. If we are centered and grounded and non-resistant, the natural essence of who we are will manifest itself. Then we find ourselves drawn to the right partner, connecting with the right work and moving towards personal completion.

I don’t think life boils down to paying the rent. I don’t think it’s about how well known you are or what deeds you accomplish. I think it’s about being true to yourself. It’s about manifesting your own experience and living with integrity, living authentically, sharing who you are. And yes, while you’re here, you will pay some rent, earn some money, and make your personal contributions for better or for worse, but these are incidental. The practice in this lifetime is about staying true to your connection. “Keep the channel open.”

When you sense and connect with something larger than yourself, a rush of energy floods your individual awareness. If you engage and align yourself in a state of fluid non-resistance, your mission moves towards natural completion as if of its own volition. You move with your forces in a way that is harmonious. This in turn opens the possibility for you to lead others in the completion of their mission. You help people find where they belong rather than forcing them to be where you think they belong.

Healing Into Wholeness

The universe is one system, a unified field of energy of which we are a part. When we feel ourselves as part of the universe, we feel where we are in the flow of creation. We naturally experience a connectedness with the earth. Feeling this connection effortlessly heals the isolation that characterizes modern life. Life becomes connectedness and we find ourselves in empowered alignment with the universe as it unfolds. Coming into alignment, feeling a sense of connection, experiencing a harmonious relationship with the universe and contributing to the unfolding—is the experience of Aikido.

Most people, particularly traditional leaders, want to skip to the third step—lead, do something to take charge, fix the situation, or help someone—without doing the first two. However, it is critical that you operate from a grounded and centered state. You can’t get

there from not-here. It is also crucial that you operate from a state of non-resistance. Any resistance you feel coming into a situation will generate counter-resistance in the situation.

Quantum Possibilities

These principles open the doorway to another world. In Aikido, the Japanese word “kokyu” describes a state in which the spirit infuses and empowers the physical, mental and emotional dimensions of life. When these dimensions cohere into wholeness, when there is harmony between the parts, life expresses kokyu.

Kokyu describes the interpenetration when people are good friends or when singers’ voices blend together well. In business or sports, when mind, body, emotions, and spirit are unified, when the mental power and the physical skills of the team members synchronize into a unified force, the dynamic power of kokyu is unstoppable.

Sports champions speak about “peak experiences” or “being in the zone” where they enter into another dimension and produce exceptional results. In the business world, the appearance of this kokyu state is called inspired leadership, intuitional decision-making, or creative problem-solving.

The first order of business is to challenge and recreate our own thinking. The Buddha taught that everything we are is a result of what we have thought. Albert Einstein said we will not solve any problem by using the same thinking that created it.

The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.
Lao-Tzu