

# WHAT IS AIKIDO?

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*Aikido*, founded and developed by the late **Morihei Ueshiba** (1886-1969), is considered a modern Japanese martial art. While it is true that it is the youngest of the traditional *budo* arts of Japan, it is nonetheless one that is firmly grounded in ancient disciplines and timeless philosophy.

**Ueshiba O Sensei** mastered various forms of the martial arts, most notably *Jujitsu* (unarmed defense), *Kenjitsu* (sword), and *Sojitsu* (spear) en route to establishing *Aikido* as a unique martial art. *O Sensei*, a deeply religious man of the Omotokyo Shinto faith, believed the power of *Aikido* springs from the spiritual energy released when an individual unites mind and body, and becomes one with nature, and thus one with the universe. His many discourses on religion left many confused, but left no doubt of his superior understanding of his art.

We call *Aikido* a martial art, but it is important that we truly understand what this means. Although the martial, or the combative elements exist in *Aikido* techniques, there exists also the creative, artistic development of technique and its appreciation. This artistic aspect is also very much a part of *Aikido*.

Through *Aikido*, we learn to use the principles of harmony and circular motion to control any attack that is directed at us. We also develop an awareness of the unity of mind and body along with an appreciation for the greatness of nature and the universe at large. Thus, through our martial training, we begin to realize the artistic elements of *Aikido*.

It then becomes our *shugyo* to carry the feelings of harmony and the awareness gained through *Aikido* training into our daily lives. This is a natural and inevitable progression. Our training in harmony leads to harmony in our lives and this becomes the ultimate goal.

It is easy to see, then, the importance of the *dojo*, a place where we can be as mirrors for each other, helping each other to grow and develop in the art of harmony. A *dojo* is not merely four walls and a mat; it is all of us together, supporting and helping each other towards a common goal, in an environment conducive to growth.

*O Sensei* described *Aikido* in many ways and left us many techniques and methods to develop proficiency. But how can we understand what he was trying to convey through his words and actions? Words and visual experience can only describe the essence of *Aikido*.

To experience the deeper meaning of *Aikido* requires practicing regularly, persistently, and patiently. With time, our practice opens the door to understanding.