

Psychotherapy Guidebook

# AIKIDO

Robert Frager

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# Aikido

*Robert Frager*

## DEFINITION

AI means oneness, meeting, harmony. KI means mind, energy, spirit, the spirit of the universe. DO means road, path, way of life. Aikido might be translated: “the way of harmonizing with the spirit of the universe,” or “a way of unifying life energy.”

Aikido is derived from the Japanese martial arts, the disciplines of the samurai. In its practical application, Aikido is a combat and self-defense art, yet it is more than a physical discipline; into its techniques are woven elements of philosophy, psychology, and dynamics.

## HISTORY

Aikido is one of the most recent Japanese martial arts. Its founder, Morihei Ueshiba, or O’Sensei (great teacher), devoted more than seventy years to the study of budo (martial arts). He mastered many different combat arts, including various schools of jujitsu, swordsmanship, and the use of the staff and spear.

O'Sensei won many matches, but he was troubled with the feeling that winning at somebody else's expense is not really winning. He came to believe that true self-defense is not winning over others, but winning over the discord within oneself. In 1925, O'Sensei had a major spiritual experience that deeply affected the development of Aikido: "I understood "budo is not felling the opponent by our force; nor is it a tool to lead the world into destructions with arms. True budo is to accept the spirit of the universe, keep the peace of the world, correctly produce, protect, and cultivate all being in Nature."

In 1953, Aikido was introduced to Hawaii and later to the mainland. Today there are Aikido schools and clubs in most major cities and universities of Japan and the United States.

## TECHNIQUE

There are literally hundreds of Aikido techniques. The basic principle behind all techniques is harmonizing one's movements with those of one or more partners. For the author, there are three basic aspects of Aikido training — "centering," energy flow, and harmony.

Centering practice includes focus on the lower abdomen. Beginning Aikido students learn to keep neck and shoulders relaxed and to integrate all movements from their center (lower abdomen). In the East, the abdomen is considered a major center for meditative practices, and the storehouse of

vital energy in the body. It is also the area of physical balance and psychological stability. The physical and psychological aspects of centering are thought to be virtually one and the same. When we are emotionally or mentally tense, our bodies are also tense, and vice versa. And it is also true that we can become more calm and centered through physical discipline, and this will result in greater mental and emotional balance and calmness.

Energy flow is essential in Aikido practice. Conscious mind-body coordination is basic to all Aikido training. This is taught through the concept of energy and forming a mental image of energy flow. Students are taught to visualize energy extended out from the hands and fingers. Relaxed, flowing movement is stressed rather than jerky “muscular” movement.

Harmony is a central theme of Aikido. Stress is placed on flexibility and grace. Many of the Aikido movements are circular, with emphasis on blending with the movement of one’s partner. Essential in Aikido practice is the attitude of working with a partner rather than fighting or competing against an opponent. The aim in Aikido is to go along with the partner’s energy, not to fight force with force.

## APPLICATIONS

Aikido can help the therapist in relation to violent or potentially violent patients. Howard Pashenz, a psychotherapist and Aikido black belt, has given

several examples of this practical use of Aikido with patients. According to Pashenz, one possible use of Aikido training combined with therapy is to begin to develop a relationship with those who ordinarily refuse to become involved with any adult authority figure; for example, acting out adolescents. Another such group is bright underachievers who have built up blocks against verbal situations. Also, Aikido can be useful along with psychotherapy, in either a supportive role or as a supplemental, nonverbal form of therapy in its own right.

Traditional Aikido practice itself stresses relaxed, supple movements, free from any form of rigidity, whether physical or mental. This training can be extremely effective in eliminating habitual physical tension as well as psychological rigidity. It can help patients deal with fears and aggressive impulses, and develop a more positive self-image.

Von Durckheim, K. Hara. London: Allen & Unwin, 1962.