

Does Aikido Really Work?

Last year I wrote a newsletter item about Aikido and the ‘three bears’ which discussed whether attacks should be hard, soft or ‘just right’? You may have recently seen some discussion in the Aikido press and on YouTube, regarding the effectiveness of Aikido and asking the question - “Does Aikido really work?”. I would just like to add a few more words on this subject – in the hope it might help some of you who are wrangling with these questions.

Aikido may not provide a complete self-defence package but neither do the other Martial Arts (although some may be more practical than others). They all have their limitations. If your desire is to have your self-defence skills honed to such a level that you can deal with any potential threat to you or your family, then unless you are going to consider joining the ‘special forces’, maybe you should just review your life balance priorities? Without wishing to brush aside the very valid concern for self-defence, most of us also have many other potential stressful situations facing us in our daily life from which we need protecting and which probably pose an equally valid risk to our health and wellbeing. Aikido can be a great help with these too.

Studying Aikido will, without doubt, enhance your ability to defend yourself. How effective this ability will be, however, rests with your attitude and how you can adapt and use the skills you have learnt in the Dojo. In most martial arts you are studying forms in a very controlled situation, with prescribed attacks and specific defence techniques. The individual forms you study on the mat are not in themselves intended to represent a real situation. They are there to simply train and condition your body and mind to deal with a series of ever increasing predictable situations. These should inevitably, in time and with the right attitude, improve your ability to deal with an unpredictable situation. Therefore you will be better prepared to defend yourself.

I worry that some students come away from an Aikido session thinking that the techniques learnt on the mat can be directly applied in real life. This can lead to a very serious misconception of their ability. I also worry about the students who criticise those who don’t train hard enough, thinking that by simply training hard and strong this gives them a better ability to defend themselves. Such attacks are great to test but remember, they are still not real and the uke is still giving themselves to you and is a compliant opponent.

Please remember, no matter how many techniques you have neatly packaged away, ready to be instantly recalled on the street, if you cannot remain relaxed and move freely with awareness, you will freeze like a rabbit in the headlights and fail to deliver. Enjoy your practice and remember, it is a long path to Aikido enlightenment and even if you don’t reach the end, it’s well worth the journey.

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