

Aikido - the non-aggressive martial art

Answers to Questions You May Have About Aikido & Aiki Kai Australia



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Thank you for coming to enquire about commencing Aikido training, below are some of the many questions you may have. By giving you our viewpoint in these answers you can decide if what we do has some appeal for you.

Please feel free to ask at the dojo if you want further explanation on these questions, or any questions you may have which we didn't cover.

1. “Why should I choose Aikido?”

Like many people, you may be looking at a number of different martial arts, wondering which one will be right for you. Or, you may have your mind set on Aikido training but considering which particular form or dojo may suit you better.

Only you can decide which one feels right for you but as a help, here's a few pointers on how we view Aikido.

Firstly, Aikido is about training you, in both a mental as well as a physical sense. It is not about showing you how to beat up another person. The techniques are based around self-defence movements but injuring another human being is the furthest thing from our minds. Nor do the ideas of 'beating' or "winning against" another individual have any importance. Self-defence skills that you develop are a secondary result of the training, not the primary purpose. When you leave an Aikido session you should feel invigorated knowing your mind has had an equal workout with the body. Training is very vigorous at times but our first priority is always the care and safety of everyone on the mat.

This brings us to one of the main differences between Aikido and other martial ways - there is no competition in Aikido - winning or losing do not factor into our thinking.

We are often asked, “Well, what's point?” This is where explanations get tricky and you have to take a moment to analyse this next bit. If you try and beat or win over someone else the techniques become very confrontational and often end up with power or strength against strength.

The second major difference of Aikido is that we try never to conflict with the intention of the other person. We simply agree with the direction of their energy/force/strength and then lead that force to a point where the person can no longer maintain their balance.

The blending of two energies into one for a harmonious relationship might sound easy but requires a considerable amount of training and skill to achieve. Don't be surprised if it takes you a little while to get this right once you start training, as people's natural inclination is to use force against force. A rough translation of the name 'Aikido' means the way of harmony (blending mind and body). Many martial arts touch on these aspects but Aikido makes it the essential building block for all we do.



2. “Harmonising might be all well and good but how does it help me if I’m attacked and need to defend myself?”

Strange as it sounds but learning how not to fight is far better than learning how to fight. When someone is aggressive toward you they are usually intent on grabbing or punching you - their focus is very narrow. Aikido training shows you by agreeing with the direction people might attack you (and it doesn't really matter from which direction or how they attack you) you can redirect that energy. Because you are not fighting with them, you are not opposing their strength. In Aikido we often move in a circular way so their power as it comes towards us goes shooting off another direction, just like a centrifuge.

Martial intent is in everything we do, but it is often very subtle and may not be immediately obvious. Which is why all through our training we don't focus on self-defence, as it is too limiting an approach, both physically and mentally. Learning not to fight is mostly about learning how not to be confrontational or defensive with others.

3. “Do I have to learn weapons?”

Short answer, yes. Learning to use weapons broadens our skill base. For instance, applying a hand technique with a weapon hugely improves our understanding of the movement's subtleties - the direction, proper distance and timing. Not only that but weapons training instils a greater level of discipline into our movements that simple hand techniques can't begin to match.

And, if you were wondering about the kneeling techniques, yes, that's usual as well, unless you have infirmities or injuries that prevent from you doing it. Let your instructor know if you have a problem.

4. “Who can train Aikido?”

Due to the non-conflict nature of Aikido, people of any age and both sexes can train together quite easily. Whilst older students may not be as vigorous as some of the younger ones, they too can master most of the movements. We each train to our own capacity and ability, this is not to say that the instructor won't work you hard. Improvement happens over time, don't compare yourself to the person standing beside you.

5. “Is Aikido considered a full contact martial way”

Having just said we look after each other you do need to be aware that Aikido is full contact. In other words, we make physical contact with each other, apply quite painful wrist, arm and shoulder locks and throw each other all over the place. However, all this is done with care and consideration. Each of us takes a turn in giving someone else the gift of our body to train with and in Aikido we treat this gift with great respect. Just be prepared, even with great respect this can be a painful, but not damaging, experience!

6. “How often do injuries happen?”

Aikido training can be quite exhausting and you'll know you've had a good workout! But as everyone is looking out for the welfare of everyone else, injuries are very rare. We don't bend joints against their natural direction, plus we do many exercises to make the joints flexible yet strong. When we throw someone we take care that they are able to receive the energy and direction or we adjust the our energy level so they can better cope with the falling.

Even the way we fall differs from many other martial ways. With Aikido we take the energy that has been used to throw us down and re-use it to help propel us up again. Instead of crashing down hard onto the mats we use the momentum to roll lightly along the mats and then stand up again in one movement, ready to receive the next technique. This all fits with the continuously

flowing style of Aikido. However, having said all that, *any activity involving this degree of physical interaction can involve some risk of permanent serious physical injury.*

7. “What’s the difference between ‘martial art’ and ‘martial way?’”

These terms are used interchangeably nowadays but in Japanese parlance they describe distinct types of training and attitude. A form that ends in ‘jutsu’, such as ju jutsu, ken jutsu etc, is primarily a physical fighting form and taught to just defeat someone else - generally in a violent fashion.

‘Do’ forms on the other hand, like Aikido, maintain the martial discipline of such techniques but use them for more introspective training and their martial aspect is subsumed to an extent by this personal-developmental aspect of vigorous exercise combined with deep study of the form. With ‘do’ forms the mental side of training is usually just as important as the physical side.

8. “So, how do I start?”

The first thing you have to do is observe a class. This gives you a small insight to what we do and how we do it. Most Aiki Kai Australia dojos offer some sort of introductory classes; enquire where you received this brochure on what they have available. You will be required to complete Parts 1 & 2 of our membership application before you can commence any form of training. This confirms you know what you are getting into and provides details of who you are.

Once you’ve finished the introductory classes you then have the option of taking an interim membership or a full twelve-month membership. We renew our membership to the association and studentship to the Sugano Aikido Foundation annually. *Membership is mandatory as it covers you for public liability insurance and personal injury insurance, however our personal*

injury insurance only provides very nominal cover for medical expenses, so if you think it necessary, you should make your own arrangements for more extended cover.

Membership money also goes towards the running of the association, which is a national body, and assists with the continuing development of Aikido training and quality in Australia.



9. “Why should I join Aiki Kai Australia?”

Aiki Kai Australia represents the mainstream of Aikido thinking. Our founding teacher, Sugano Shihan (dec), was a live-in (uchi-deshi) student of the founder of Aikido, Ueshiba Morihei O Sensei. So you could say we follow the trunk of the tree. There are a number of schools that have branched off, after their particular founders studied under O Sensei, then wanted to concentrate on certain aspects of his training and apply their own interpretations. Sugano Shihan took great care to pass the ideas and teachings that O Sensei gave to him onto his students and now we strive to maintain that direct tradition.

We are not a sport, there are no competitions, we train in the traditional method of taking turns to apply techniques to each other, or in a group. As you progress you will be required to train with a multiple of people at the one time, which will build a sound understanding of individual and group dynamics.

We are Officially Recognised by the World Aikido Headquarters in Japan and have authorisation to grade students to very senior black-belt levels. These grades are internationally recognised and all our students who grade to black-belt level receive a personal certificate from the Japanese headquarters, Hombu, and their grade details are registered there.

To help you get to this standard, Aiki Kai Australia has an enviable list of the most highly graded instructors in the country, with at least a 6th Dan, or higher grade, in every State and Territory.



Most of these people will have been training in excess of 30 years! All have been taught by Sugano Shihan and closely follow the instruction he passed on from Ueshiba Morihei O Sensei.

Shihans are appointed only by the World Aikido Headquarters, Japan, these master teachers are selected people who show an exemplary understanding of Aikido and have demonstrated the ability to pass on their knowledge. Currently, AKA has three 7th Dans who have officially received shihan qualification and regularly teach across Australia and overseas.

As a general guide, when visiting various dojos watch how they train – look for a happy dojo, where people are working hard and enjoying themselves at the same time! See if the style of training would suit you. If it's an Aiki Kai dojo, please feel free to ask as many questions as you like!

ONE really important major difference is we are a not-for-profit organisation. All our instructors donate their time. Which means the training is based around quality not quantity. We don't rely on student numbers for our livelihoods; therefore, our main interest is to impart the best Aikido we know how.

For you this means, training as hard as you're able, meeting high standards and working through a rigorous grading syllabus. As you pass each grading test you'll feel a great degree of pleasure and satisfaction, knowing the work you put in to attain that level.

Dojo Information

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