

AIKIDO

and the Harmony of Nature



MITSUGI SAOTOME

“Anyone with an interest in Asian culture and philosophy will also find it interesting and entertaining. Over the years I have heard many people ask, ‘What is Aikido?’ Mitsugi Saotome has provided us with a well-written and thorough answer.”

—*Pacific World*

“*Aikido and the Harmony of Nature* reveals the profound philosophical and ethical principles embodied in the art of Aikido and relates those principles to the laws of nature. It is among the clearest, deepest, and most inspiring books ever written on Aikido or, for that matter, on any martial art.”

—Susan Perry, Editor-in-Chief, *Aikido Today* magazine

ABOUT THE BOOK

Here is a unique approach to the teachings of the Founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba, as interpreted by his direct student of fifteen years. Mitsugi Saotome examines the spiritual philosophy of the Founder, the warrior ideals of feudal Japan as the basis of his martial arts philosophy, and the scientific principles underlying the philosophy of Aikido technique.

The author shows that the physical movement of Aikido is the embodiment of principles of the spirit. Negative force is not countered with aggression but is controlled and redirected through the power and balance of spiral movement. This is the shape of Aikido and the dynamic shape at the foundation of all energies of existence. Aikido movement can only be understood from its roots in universal law and the processes of nature. The sincere practice and study of Aikido deepens our appreciation for the perfection of nature’s balance and brings us back into harmony with our environment, other people, and ourselves.

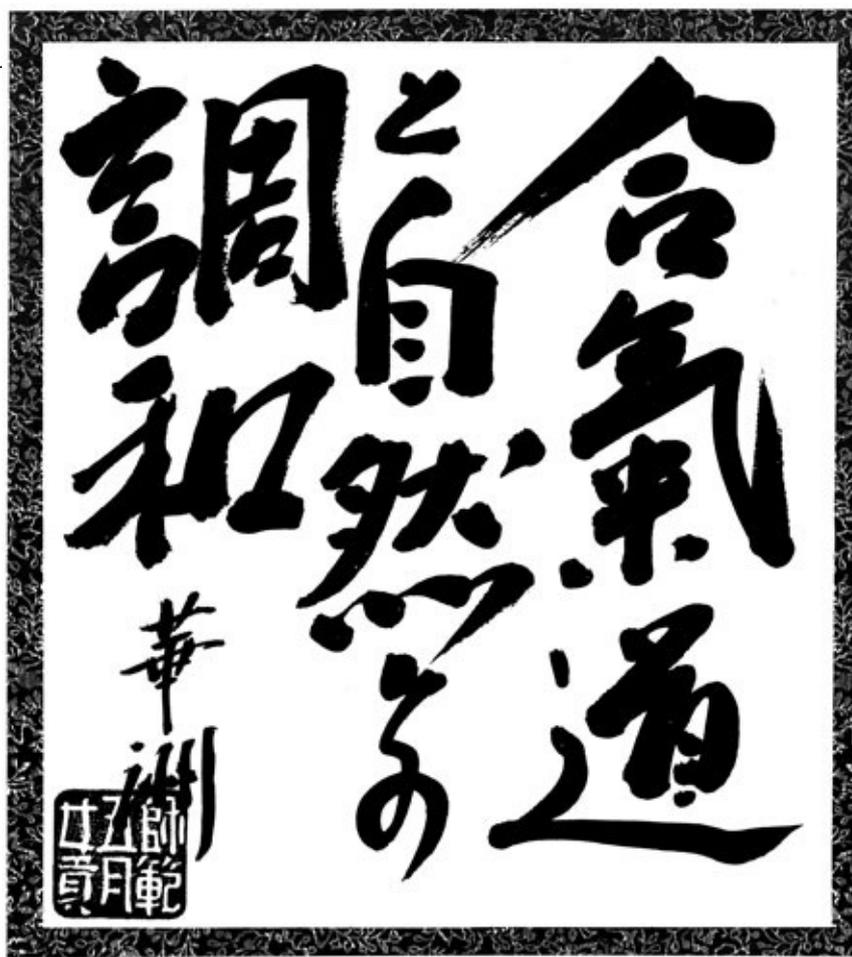
Abundantly illustrated with the author’s drawings, diagrams, and calligraphies, as well as photographs demonstrating Aikido techniques, the book also offers a history of Aikido, personal anecdotes about the Founder, and translations of several of his lectures.

MITSUGI SAOTOME Sensei is the founder of the Aikido Schools of Ueshiba and the chief instructor at the Aikido Shobukan Dojo in Washington, D.C. He is also the author of *The Principles of Aikido*.

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Aikido To Shizen To No Chowa: *Aikido and the Harmony of Nature*

AIKIDO

and the
HARMONY
OF NATURE

MITSUGI SAOTOME



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E-MAIL SIGN-UP

著者寸感

合氣とは宇宙の根源的な生命活動力を表す真理であって
哲学ではなく玄剣をして、この大自然界に休むことなく働いている
調和を産み出しているとする現実の姿である。この真理の働きを体
練や生活哲理に生かすのが武産合氣である。

人類の川に之の文明の舟台めから「武」とは戈を止めるという東
洋においては世の中に平和な社会を建設するための祭り事の
全活動力の意味を指すのである。これを極言して私の恩師である
合氣道の南祖植芝盛平大先生は「武は愛なり」と唱えられたの
である。だからといって我々が武道に対して安易に理解は如
くに認識することは真に「さむらいの道」として全生涯を献
身的に生きた実例としての植芝盛平大先生を正しく追慕す
ることはなうないであろう。

人間の精神的な真実からの覚醒と世界の平和のために知合
なさしめる道を探求しながら神に介りつつ利他愛心に生
きたのである。自己にきびしい修業を課して至言成と睿又知の体
現、宇宙心との調和、人類愛こそ合氣道南祖の教示され
た道である。

この著書を南祖の霊と関係者に捧げる。合氣道師範

五由志 

Dedication

Aikido is not philosophy. Aikido is the true expression and revelation of the ever-evolving function of the universe. Thus is derived the goal of Takemusu Aiki—experiencing the mechanisms of nature's truth in training and applying the theories in our daily life.

In Asia the word *Bu* means to halt the danger of the thrusting blade. Since the beginnings of human culture, this concept of *Bu* has implied a global advancement toward the construction of a peaceful society. “*Bu* is love,” proclaimed O Sensei, Morihei Ueshiba, the Founder of Aikido and my mentor. Yet no simplistic understanding of Budo can in any way measure the life of unfathomable devotion and dedication O Sensei led in the Way of the true samurai. He strove for a human revelation of spiritual truth, and for world harmony through daily prayer and total unselfish concern for others. We must train hard for the attainment of wisdom, for harmony and an unselfish love for all humankind. Such is the path the Founder of Aikido has cultivated for us to follow.

I dedicate this book to the Founder of Aikido and to all Aikido followers.

SHIHAN M. SAOTOMI

Translator's Note

Appearing in italics throughout this text are Japanese words and phrases which many readers will encounter for the first time. Often they have no English equivalent. Rather than try to give their literal meaning word for word, which is often misleading, we have tried to give the feeling and philosophy behind the word in the hope of presenting a clearer explanation. Some words will be defined more than once as the book progresses, so please do not accept the first explanation as the fullest. Each chapter builds on the preceding ones.

Most of the book has been written from discussions with Saotome Sensei and from his dictation into English. His usage of the English language, while not grammatically exact, is unique with a fresh and stimulating way of expressing his thoughts. To put some of these expressions into conventional English would make them much less effective. The goal has been to retain as much of his feeling and power as possible. If there are inconsistencies, errors, or misinterpretations, the fault is mine.

The Japanese names of persons born before the Meiji Restoration are written in the traditional Japanese manner, with family name first. Those born after that date, 1868, are written in the Western manner, with the family name last.

The use of the masculine pronoun to refer to both males and females has been avoided as much as possible, but because of the structure of the English language, flow and readability have often dictated its use. There is no such limitation in the Japanese language.

Deepest appreciation to Paul Kang, who freely gave of his time and energy to produce translations from the Japanese of the many difficult, complex ideas and O Sensei's speeches, and to Saotome Bluestone, who added her professional touch to some of the diagrams and drawings. This book has gone through many changes to evolve to its present form, and many people, too numerous to name here, have helped in all its phases. Thank you all so much. And a special thank-you to Dr. David Jones for his guidance and support.

PATRICIA SAOTOME



Mitsugi Saotome (left) and Doshu Kisshomaru Ueshiba, son of the Founder

Preface

I think many people may have difficulty understanding *Aikido and the Harmony of Nature*. Some will be disappointed because there is so little explanation of the physical education of Aikido self-defense technique. In their search for technical information, these readers may miss the connection to Aikido in the discussion of science and the processes of nature. But the function of Aikido is different. It is not technique in the narrow sense, but the true meaning of the teachings of Morihei Ueshiba, the Founder of Aikido, that I wish to transmit.

Aikido movement must be understood from its roots deep in universal law. Its goal is to promote a deeper understanding and appreciation of the perfection of nature's balance, and to bring humanity back into harmony with God. I want to create in each person's mind a vivid flashback into our beginnings. I want to draw from your subconscious mind the memory of the very beginning of life and the struggle through time and space of the incredible evolution of humanity. I want you to feel the beauty and power of that evolution and give thanks to the Divine Creator.

We too easily forget our roots. In our selfishness we forget the delicate balance of the dependence of one life form on all others. If everyone applied to nature's resources a conservation born of respect, love, and understanding, and used them with an attitude of sincere thanksgiving to God, nature would be protected and the quality of life enriched. By protecting nature we protect society. By protecting society we protect ourselves. Self-defense is protecting and sustaining life. If nature is destroyed, the most fundamental requirement for survival is destroyed. To survive, we must nourish our body. If there is no food, if the water and the air are contaminated, there is no life, no society.

This is the essence of Budo. It is not the narrow art of fighting technique, but the art of saving life. And Aikido is first and always Budo. What help is fighting technique if there are one hundred starving people and no food? Many great Budo masters understood this. Many gave up the sword and returned to the land.

We live in a throw-away society of instant dinners and paper cups; every lazy, selfish act of excess is a crime of violence against nature. We are all criminals: we are killing ourselves.

Peace and harmony is not a game of logic. Only through peace and harmony and an abiding respect for nature's laws can we save our lives, and the lives of our children, and of our children's children.

This is O Sensei's teaching. This is my reason for writing this book.



Grand Master Morihei Ueshiba

FOREWORD

by David Jones

I would like to comment on Saotome Sensei's work, *Aikido and the Harmony of Nature*, from the perspective of my academic specialty, ethnology, the field of anthropology that focuses on the human cultural experience. One of my interests as an ethnologist has been the discovery of those aspects of the human adventure which seem to have near-universal expression under given cultural conditions.

In one sense, the thousands of recurring behaviors and responses described by anthropology present a picture of the universal human being. They may speak of the most ancient nature of the species and demonstrate those perceptions and actions that humans seem to find again and again to be apt and true. Aikido, viewed in its more sophisticated guise, is a modern facet of this endless wave of occurrence of those images of being, those codes of behavior to which billions of humans through many thousands of years have said, "Yes!" As the following brief survey will suggest, anthropology supports Saotome Sensei in his opinion that Aikido comprises a Way, or life model, that can have meaning for the world citizenry.

One of the many important contributions that Saotome Sensei offers in this book is a presentation and explanation of *Kannagara No Michi*, the worldview of Aikido's founder, Master Morihei Ueshiba. Students of Japanese martial culture, and of Aikido in particular, will be very interested in the assumptions Ueshiba held concerning the nature of things, since these ideas form the bedrock of the structure of Aikido. Saotome Sensei tells us that *kannagara* means "the stream of God; the flow of creative energy that reaches from the past into the future." He adds that *Kannagara No Michi* is "Way of life that strives for the truth and reality which is God." Saotome writes:

Kannagara is way of intuition. . . . Kannagara is a way of supreme freedom. . . . For the true follower of the Way, all actions arise from an unconscious and sincerely felt respect and appreciation for the perfection of nature's process and from the knowledge that all things have within them a living part of the Divine Spirit of Kami, the Creator of the Universe. The mountains have God's name. The wind has God's name. The rivers have God's name. . . . The idea that many *kami* exist, as well as one original *Kami*, may seem a paradox; and the idea that *kami* govern the workings of the mountains and rivers, of the earth and the heavens, of trees and birds, may be incomprehensible to those who have received an education in modern science.

Kami might be seen as Master Ueshiba's experiential means of comprehending the singular immensity of *Kannagara* in the particulars of daily life. The basic notion of *kami*, that all things have a spiritual consciousness, an inner spark, is well known in anthropology. We use the term *animism* to describe a religious belief system in which every plant, animal, human, celestial body, earth form, and force of nature is felt to have this second self, soul, or spirit essence. Edward B. Tylor, the founder of cultural anthropology, coined the term *animism* and labeled his theory concerning the origin and nature of religion "the theory of animism" because his studies indicated that animism was one of the most ancient and pervasive of all religious ideas.

The "many *kami*/one *Kami*" view of *Kannagara No Michi* also resonates with the essential core of totemism. The most famous and influential of all sociologists, Emile Durkheim, in his classic *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, described totemism as the original shape of religion. The totemic model, in a variety of forms and bearing a wide range of labels, permeates the human pilgrimage.

Another central aspect of Aikido is the Japanese concept *ki*. This is a notoriously difficult idea

translate for the West. Saotome Sensei succinctly states that *ki* is “the cosmic essence of life.” anthropology *animatism* is the term used to identify a belief in a nonanthropomorphic, free-floating force thought to exist all the time, everywhere, and in everything. (Some prominent early anthropologists thought animatism to be even more widespread than animism.) *Ki* is the word for the force in Japanese. The Chinese call it *ch’i* (*qi*), while the Indian yogi speaks of *prana*. The Sioux word is *wakan*; the Comanche, *puha*. Each, to be sure, carries a particular and unique cultural gloss, but the basic belief found in each of these examples and many, many others is the same.

In connecting various strands of Aikido to certain belief modes such as animism, animatism, and totemism, I am not suggesting that Aikido is merely composed of a collection of ancient ideas. A large portion of “ancient ideas” may not be worth mentioning. I feel that animism, animatism, and totemism may best be thought of as labels for certain ways human beings think about the nature of existence. If one looks behind the Japanese word *ki*, the Comanche word *puha*, or the Sioux word *wakan*, one simply sees a human being understanding life in an apparently very, very human way. Though the words may change, and the particular animatistic concept may undergo certain structural modifications, the perception of some vaguely discernible “cosmic essence” is always, in both ancient and modern life-ways, somewhere present. I would say that all humanity embraces what the word points to and, in fact, lives by it.

In the practice of Aikido in the *dojo*, or practice area, the student is constantly being cautioned to move from the “center,” to be “centered” in the execution of a particular self-defense technique, to “extend *ki* from the center.” The Japanese use the word *hara* to identify this center, physically located in the lower abdomen. *Hara* is considered the concentration point of physical and spiritual energy, and to the mature student of Aikido its meaning may become cosmic. The core intent of the *hara* concept is expressed throughout the world. In English, we say that someone who displays courage, fortitude, and endurance has “guts,” and in so doing we connect the lower abdomen with certain energy-demanding virtues. Once when traveling in Wyoming I heard an old cowboy tell a teenage boy who was about to ride his first rodeo bucking horse, “The only chance you have is to ride him in your stomach.” And among many Melanesian peoples of the Southwestern Pacific, a common greeting asks, “How is your navel?” In the mountainous interior of New Guinea, the Dugum Dani have the belief that an *edai ege* or “seed of singing,” exists in the body’s center and is the source of the individual’s life power. The Chinese describe the *tan-t’ien*, or sea of *ch’i*, and locate it just below the navel. The *chakra* system of Indian Yoga also identifies a key *chakra* in this position. The “center” of Aikido is the ride in the young cowboy’s stomach, the Dugum Dani’s “seed of singing,” and also the dictum of the Sioux medicine man Black Elk who said, “Anywhere is the center of the world.”

If Aikido could be said to have an identifying shape, it would likely be the circle. Master Ueshiba stated:

Aikido technique is structured on circular movement, for harmony is brought about and all conflict resolved through the spirit of the circle. . . . A circle encloses space, and it is from the perfect freedom of this emptiness that *ki* is born. From the center of the birthplace the creative processes of life are joined with the infinite, immeasurable universe by the Spirit. The Spirit is the Creative the eternal parent giving birth to all things. . . . Within the circle the *ki* of the universe is guided in the processes of creative evolution, and protection.

In *Lame Deer, Seeker of Visions*, the old Indian shaman says:

To our way of thinking, the Indians’ symbol is the circle, the hoop. Nature wants things to be round. The bodies of human beings and animals have no corners. . . . The camp in which every tipi had its place was also a ring. The tipi was a ring in which people sat in a circle and all the families in the village were in turn circles within a larger circle, part of the larger hoop. . . . The nation was only a part of the universe, in itself circular and made of the earth, which is round, of the sun, which is round, of the stars, which are round. The moon, the horizon, the rainbow—circles within circles within circles, with no beginning and no end.

To us this is beautiful and fitting, symbol and reality at the same time, expressing the harmony of life and nature. Our circle is timeless, flowing; it is new life emerging from death—life winning out over death.

In this book, Saotome Sensei urges the appearance of people with the spirit of the samurai: a spirit of courage, service, and compassion. Members of the Elk Warriors and Bow String Soldier Cheyenne Indian warrior societies, would accept the true samurai as a brother, as would the warriors of the African Nuer and Masai. Saotome Sensei discusses the meaning and importance of *marubashi* “the bridge of life,” a technique of a Japanese sword school in which one was advised to enter directly into the enemy’s attack. This strategy could be understood by many peoples. Sanapia, a Comanche Medicine Woman I studied with as a graduate student in Oklahoma, told me that the course of action that gives the Comanche warrior greatest power, or “medicine,” is found in facing the ghost directly, encountering and moving into this Comanche image of ultimate danger and evil. And we find that the story of the personal struggles of the Founder of Aikido, eloquently recounted by Saotome Sensei, is the universal tale of a sensitive, courageous, and determined man who confronts and overcomes many obstacles and hardships to experience a profound insight which he then sets out to expound. Master Ueshiba’s story could be appreciated in almost any culture.

Saotome Sensei focuses in his text on the extension of Ueshiba’s Aikido vision into the future by interpreting the basic philosophy of Aikido through the language of scientific method and research findings. In doing this, he gracefully avoids a flaw common with writers describing the “scientific basis of ancient beliefs.” Saotome Sensei manages to combine *kami*, *ki*, *kannagara*, and many other difficult concepts so skillfully with the data of science that rather than one diminishing the other, they seem to be mutually enriching. He has amplified Aikido’s voice without sacrificing its roots. After reading Saotome’s work, the image of the thunderbird seems naturally coupled with a diagram of energy flow patterns in a thunderstorm; the storm becomes more sensual and alive, and the thunderbird is given more structural authority.

For me, this particular aspect of Saotome Sensei’s presentation was especially notable. A subtle war is being waged all over the earth. Those who see the thunderbird and those who see the diagram are often in deadly conflict. The latter perceive the former as muddle-headed primitives, incompetent and dreamers, while the former see the latter as rigid, simplistic, and inhuman. As is made very clear from Saotome Sensei’s exposition, Aikido seeks harmony in conflict, not necessarily because it is the polite value of civilized people, but because harmony is creation’s essential process. There is common ground between antagonists, which, if joined, reveals a more powerful unity. The animists are shown in Saotome Sensei’s writing that science basically supports and legitimizes them, and the scientists are instructed that they can be comfortable with the animists’ view as a rich and suggestive continuation of knowledge. The anthropological philosophy can only applaud Saotome Sensei’s Aikido, deftly demonstrated here in the realm of ideas.

In his preface Saotome Sensei writes: “I want to create in each person’s mind a vivid flashback into our beginnings. I want to draw from your subconscious mind the memory of the very beginning of life and the struggle through time and space of the incredible evolution of humanity.” As an anthropologist I see the individual’s experience in Aikido as a microcosm of human biological and cultural evolution. Saotome Sensei may be speaking very literally. His Aikido ranges from the principles of energy acting in cosmic creation and identically experienced in Aikido to some of the most ancient and some of the most modern ideas and experiences of the human family. It is awesome to consider that Aikido is an art form that seeks to connect the individual with an intimate and personal experience of billions of years of creation.

A cross-cultural approach to Aikido can only be lightly touched upon here. For each example presented, dozens more could be added. Aikido is so harmonious with so many of the values, beliefs,

and behavioral tendencies of most human life-ways that a point-by-point comparison could produce volumes. It is abundantly clear that Morihei Ueshiba touched a profound chord in the human spirit. His great contribution was in devising Aikido, a carefully crafted method designed to cultivate and lead the individual to his or her own confrontation with the Truth. Master Ueshiba, a Japanese master with a special kind of genius, made Aikido and its outer form bears the mark of the Founder's culture. However, Aikido's heart, its essence, is universal.

The basic themes of Saotome Sensei's book are delivered with great verve and success. Accessible yet poetic and invigorating language, well-conceived photographs, original and inspired drawings, elegant calligraphy, pertinent Japanese cultural and historical examples, clear organization of technical and scientific materials, a poignant portrayal of Master Ueshiba's life and philosophy, and the author's overriding literary and artistic sensibilities blend to produce a powerful and beautiful work.

In *Aikido and the Harmony of Nature*, Saotome Sensei, through the idiom of Aikido, makes a plea for global sanity. Aikido is the heart of a Universal Prayer. It is an eloquent statement of a basic human desire, expressed in countless ways since the beginnings of history.

HISTORY of the FOUNDER



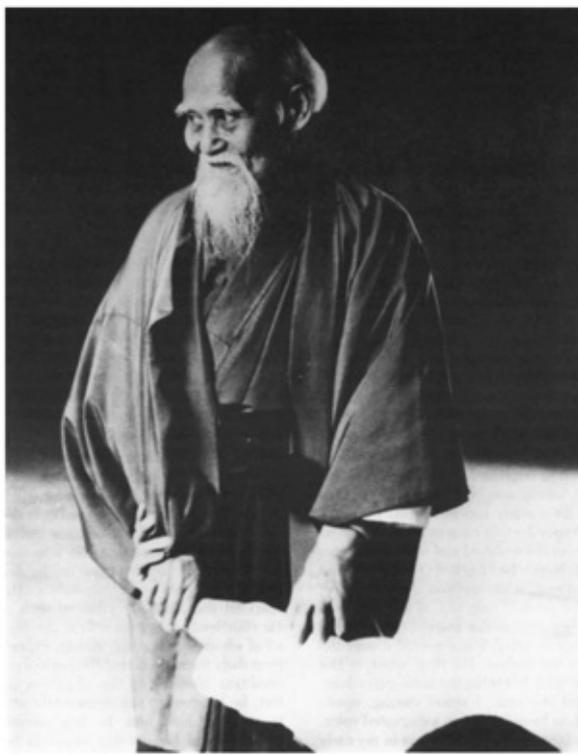
The kanji for Ai, when used alone, is translated as a meeting or joining; communication; confluence. Ki is translated as energy, power, vibration; the essence of life, of spirit. Together, Aiki, they mean to join the power; to become one with the power of the universal energy; to become one with the energy of the life force. Takemusu Aiki is the movement of truth, the protection and creation of life; a spontaneous and creative application that allows the dynamics and structure of the universal laws to be expressed in the human body, and the power of the universal energy to enter the human spirit. The first character, take, is the same as the bu in Budo. Takemusu is the spirit of the true warrior's Way.

“Saotome, that stone step must be moved a little closer to the house; it's difficult to step inside

Looking at the six-foot-long, one-foot-square solid piece of marble that my teacher had indicated, I knew it was too heavy for two men to move. I had returned from the toolshed and was rigging up a makeshift lever when I heard O Sensei behind me. "Saotome, what are you doing?" Impatiently he pushed me out of his way and grasped one end of the marble slab. With a small grunt he lifted it and moved it over the necessary six inches. He then went to the other end and, following the same procedure, completed the task. I stood staring, open-mouthed, as he mumbled in a disgusted voice, "Modern boys are so weak!" I was in my early twenties, and my muscles were strong and well tuned from many hours each day of hard Aikido training. But I could not budge the marble step that the four-foot-ten, seventy-eight-year-old master of Aikido had so easily moved.

As Morihei Ueshiba approached his mideighties, illness and time began to take their toll. He grew thin and his step was slowed. He needed help climbing stairs, and with each movement of his body he experienced severe pain. Yet throughout his illness he still taught Aikido. The moment he stepped onto the mat, he was transformed from an aging man enduring his last suffering into a man who could not be defeated by another man, nor by death itself. His presence was commanding. His eyes sparkled and his body vibrated with power. He effortlessly threw his *uchi deshi*, disciples, all of whom were young, strong, experienced from daily training, and at the peak of physical condition. Showing no sign of pain or discomfort, he laughed at our determined attempts to attack or hold him. In demonstration he would extend his wooden sword in front of him and encourage five of us at a time to push on him from the side with all our might. We could not move him or the *bokken* (wooden practice sword) a single inch. It would have been easier to move a wall of stone.

One incident stands out from all others in my memories of this time. It happened shortly before I went into the hospital. I can still see the Founder standing in front of me. As I faced him, my *bokken* poised to attack, the diminutive, frail old man was gone. In his place I saw a formidable mountain. His presence was awesome and his vibration filled the *dojo*. I looked into his eyes and was arrested by the powerful gravity of his spirit. The light shining there contained the wisdom and power of the ages. My body would not move. The palms of my hands were wet as I gripped the wooden practice sword, and sweat was breaking out on my face. My heart pounded and I could feel its rhythm throbbing through the veins in my arms and legs. O Sensei commanded, "At tack!" I gathered all my will into one *ki* and on one shout of supreme effort, attacking with all the speed and power I could muster. There was a flash of movement in front of me and O Sensei disappeared. I had made one fully committed strike. In the same timing, O Sensei had evaded my strike, and I heard the whistle of his *bokken* cutting three times. He was standing behind me. "Saotome, you attack so slowly." Just ten minutes earlier, I had supported a weak old man laboriously up two flights of stairs and into the *dojo* (practice hall).



The Founder executing the ikkyo technique.

The inevitable happened and his condition worsened. The doctors sent him home after a short stay in the hospital with the message that death was imminent. During the final two weeks of his life, as I took my turn sitting at O Sensei's bedside, I watched the familiar face beneath the wispy, white beard grow thinner day by day. I experienced a grief greater than any I had ever known as the many memories of his almost superhuman strength flooded my heart. Although his body was wasting away, his mind was sharp and his eyes had the clarity and peace of a child's. He talked very little at that time, but communication was strong and he was always thinking of Aikido.

Two days before his death he raised his frail body to a sitting position, looked at the students who were gathered there, and said, "You must not worry about this old man. All physical life is limited. Within the course of nature, the physical being must change, but the spirit will never die. Soon I will enter the spiritual world, but still I want to protect this world. That is now your task." He went into deep meditation and after some time continued, "All my students must remember, I did not create Aikido. Aiki is the wisdom of God; Aikido is the Way of the laws which He created."

O Sensei looked up and indicated that he wanted to go to the bathroom. "I'm sorry, but after lying in bed all day this old man's legs are very weak." I quickly took one arm, and my close friend Yoshi Kuroiwa took the other. Slowly we proceeded down the hall, holding him tight lest he fall and injure himself. O Sensei suddenly straightened, pride flashing in his eyes. "I don't need any help." With a powerful shudder of his body, he freed his arms from our grasp. The weakened and dying old man had thrown two master instructors.

Our bodies flew until we pounded into the walls on either side. Step by step Morihei Ueshiba made his way alone. With each step his life was burning like the last brilliant flare of a candle before its fire disappears. Calm and at peace in the face of his approaching death, he seized the reality of each moment as it occurred. There was only that moment; each breath was infinity. How many memories did each step contain? His eyes were shining, his presence powerful. It was his final challenge.



The Founder, holding a white fan, counters Mitsugi Saotome's bokken attack with an irimi movement.

A detailed account of the history of Aikido and its Founder would fill many volumes. It is impossible to give a full description in the limited space of this book. However, I believe that a short basic history would be of great assistance to the reader in achieving an understanding of the art.

The event-filled life of Morihei Ueshiba is the process that gave birth to Aikido. It is the crystallization of his intense spiritual training and the creative expression of his strong and ceaseless pursuit of truth. It is living evidence of the transformation of the selfish instincts of aggression

through severe personal discipline, and through an attitude of devotion and reverence that leads one's life to higher levels of consciousness in order to receive the noble inspiration that causes one to rise above self-love, to a love and respect for humanity and society—a universal and Divine love that Sensei called “the love of Kami,” of God.



Samurai

Throughout his life, the Founder lived as a true samurai in the ancient Japanese tradition. He embodied a state of unity with cosmic forces that has been the spiritual ideal of the martial art throughout the history of Japan. As one who brought this ideal to its ultimate completion and worked for the good of humanity and the world, his name and his life shine brilliantly in the history of Budō, the Way of the Warrior.

On December 14, 1883, in the Motomachi district of the city of Tanabe, Wakayama Prefecture, Japan, Morihei Ueshiba was born into this world, the fourth child of Yoroku and Yuki Ueshiba. A delicate and sensitive child, his early life was shadowed by illness. He often daydreamed, identifying with the miraculous stories of the great Buddhist teacher Kobo Daishi of the nearby Kumano region. At the age of seven he began studies in the basics of the Chinese classics at a private school of the Shingon sect of Buddhism. He studied deeply for one so young and possessed an extraordinary interest in the meditations, incantations, and prayers of that esoteric sect. Concerned that young Morihei was overly mental in his pursuits, his father, a strong and vigorous man, also encouraged him to discipline and strengthen his body through the practice of sumo wrestling and swimming.

During the years that followed, young Ueshiba received excellent instruction at Tanabe Elementary School. He developed a fine spirit, and his body grew healthy and strong. In intermediate school (for students between the ages of thirteen and seventeen) he took private lessons in the use of the abacus. In a little over a year he had made such rapid progress that he became assistant to the instructor at the abacus school.

Ueshiba moved to Tokyo in the spring of 1901 and established the Ueshiba Company, a stationery store large enough to employ several sales clerks. Meanwhile, a strong interest in Budō had awakened in him, and while he was in Tokyo, he studied both the Kito School of Koryu Jujutsu (unarmed combat) and the Shinkage School of Kenjutsu (techniques of swordsmanship). However, illness was to touch his life once again, and after giving his business to his employees, he returned home to Tanabe to convalesce. After his recovery Ueshiba married Hatsu Itokawa, whom he had known since childhood. The attitude of deep social responsibility that had been impressed on him by his father became stronger as he assumed the responsibilities of family life. Believing that change could occur only through action, Ueshiba became involved in many social reforms.

When a new fishing law was enacted that favored the large commercial fishing fleets, undue hardships were imposed on the smaller fishermen of the district where Ueshiba lived. Daring to oppose this law, he joined the campaign to revise it and participated in the “Iso Incident,” a protest

demonstration held in the small fishing village of Iso. With his help the problem was solved, and he became well known for his work.

At the age of twenty, Ueshiba enlisted in the military and served in the thirty-seventh regiment of the Osaka Fourth Division. His sincere and hard-working attitude and his extraordinary skill quickly drew the attention of his superiors. Easily regarded as the best bayonetist in the regiment, he displayed a technique so swift and clean that even the closest scrutiny of the judges could not detect how it was that each opponent was instantly sent flying.

During the Russo-Japanese War the stories brought back by Ueshiba's comrades of his great courage under fire made him a living legend, and among the troops he was respectfully called "the Soldier Kami." Recognizing his talent and his capability to become a future general, his superiors urged him to attend officer training school, but because of the situation at home, Ueshiba left the military after four years of enlistment. He took with him a certificate from the Yagyu School of Swordsmanship, obtained through study and practice during his off-duty hours, and the admiration and respect of all who had served with him. Upon his return to Tanabe, he channeled his skill and energy into social service and worked hard for the public good. He gained popularity among the people for his honesty and devotion.

In 1912, the Japanese government announced the beginning of the Hokkaido Project, encouraging people to settle in this northernmost, undeveloped island. The additional living space and farming lands were necessary to the welfare of the nation, and the Russians were showing an interest in its strategic location. The adventure of a new life and devotion to Japan were to challenge Ueshiba once again. So at the age of twenty-nine, he organized eighty people from fifty-four households in the area, and together they moved to the village of Shirataki, in Monbetsu County, Hokkaido.

The frozen land was harsh and inhospitable, unwilling to yield to the efforts of the new settlers. They were beset by storms and heavy snows, making their planned logging operations impossible. They tried to clear the land for cultivation, but the freezing rains drove them back into their hastily constructed shelters. Progress was slow, and the price paid in time and suffering was high. The first two years brought poor harvests and many hardships. Spirits were low, but Ueshiba encouraged the people, setting an example by his optimism and ceaseless hard work at the settlement, and he determined pursuit of negotiations for relief funds from every possible source.

Two years later, in the fall, the land yielded its long-awaited harvest and the people began to feel that a permanent settlement was feasible. Each of the projects they undertook—pepper cultivation, lumbering, horse breeding, and dairy farming—was based on Ueshiba's plan and proved to be an important factor in the development of Shirataki. The village took on new life. People began to call Ueshiba "King of Shirataki," and when they had problems they came to him for advice and help. He served as a member of the village council and assisted in an exploratory excavation for underground mineral resources. In 1915 he met Sogaku Takeda, master of the Daito School of Jujutsu who had occasion to pass through the area. Ueshiba was very impressed by Takeda's technique and continued in his quest for Budo with the study of Daito Ryu.

In November of his thirty-sixth year, Ueshiba received news that his father was in critical condition. Leaving Hokkaido, he gave his entire holdings to Master Takeda in appreciation for all that he had taught him. But on the way back to Tanabe, he was diverted by stories of a man named Onisaburo Deguchi of the new Shinto sect known as Omoto-kyo. Deguchi was a master of the spiritual practice called *chin kon kishin*, a Way of communication with the Divine Spirit of Kami through concentrated meditation. With the hope of a miracle, Ueshiba went to Ayabe, near Kyoto, to ask for prayers to alleviate his father's critical condition.

Upon his return to Tanabe, he learned that his father had passed away. His sorrow was deep, and he spent more and more of his time in prayer and meditation. Soon Ueshiba's thoughts returned

Deguchi's kindness and revolutionary approach to traditional spiritual teachings. He moved his family to Ayabe and entered the religious life of Omoto-kyo. Deguchi loved and respected Ueshiba and invested him with much authority and responsibility. Deguchi told him, "You should make Budo your life. You have the strength to move mountains. Do it!"



Acting on this advice, the Founder opened the "Ueshiba School" of martial arts. He taught most those who had some connection with Omoto-kyo, but his fame as a martial artist quickly spread among other people. He cleared and cultivated the land near the main hall of Omoto-kyo, led the self-sufficient life of a farmer, and put into practice his idea of the essential unity of Budo and farming. The study of *kotodama*, the spiritual function of the vibration of sound, had become a key aspect in his search for the true spirit of Budo, and gradually he began to bring about the unification of spirit, mind, and body. In 1923, the Founder officially named his art Aiki Bujutsu. *Aiki Bujutsu* is the blending of spirit based on classical martial movement. *Jutsu* is technique, as opposed to *do*, which is a path or way.

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