

What has Dr. Shook been reading?  
The Way of Aikido  
Life Lessons From an American Sensei.  
By George Leonard  
Published by the Penguin Group

Aikido is one of the youngest and fastest growing of the Martial Arts. Aikido's founder, Morihei Ueshiba, grew from a sickly child to a kick-ass martial artist. One day after a strenuous sword duel he was struck by the realization that the true destiny of the martial arts was not contention and domination but love. This was a big change from the basic Samurai warrior mind set. Morihei Ueshiba passed away in 1969 at the age of 86. Students who trained with him still teach today.

Translated, the word Aikido means "The way of harmonious energy". The practice of Aikido is both physically powerful and spiritually stimulating. This way of harmonious energy does not seek victory over an enemy but rather seeks the loving protection of all beings.

I have a prejudice for this remarkable martial art. As a young woman I studied, trained, received my black belt and eventually taught at the Aikido of Monterey dojo (school) in California. Unique among the fighting arts Aikido promotes the resolution of conflict without creating a greater conflict. This potential for a positive alternative to conflict when faced with physical assault transfers readily to the interpersonal conflicts of daily life.

George Leonard is a fabulous aikidoist and storyteller. He has trained and taught aikido for 28 years. In his book *The Way of Aikido*, Sensei (Honorable teacher) Leonard shares with the reader how the incorporation of Aikido into his everyday life transformed conflict, stress and anxiety into opportunity, reconciliation and vital energy. George Leonard also introduces the reader to workshops he has presented to the non-martial artist. These workshops include teaching stories and exercises for the development of Mind- Body coordination and the incorporation of Aikido philosophy to better deal with conflict, stress and pain.

His book *The Way of Aikido* discusses topics such as; Finding the gift in misfortune, the importance of practice and play, the benefits of optimism, finding your physical and mental center of gravity and returning the word "Power" to its original roots: "To be able". A quote from his book...*"I believe that the Aikido philosophy can be of great help in realizing our potential, especially in this uncertain age. We urgently need more balance and centeredness. Positive alternatives to conflict. Model strong and beautiful rather than contentious and ugly behaviors for our young people."*

I would agree.

The trained Warrior, fighter or athlete will easily follow the vivid descriptions of Aikido's dynamic physical form. Those less prone to battle will quickly recognize the applications of Aikido in every day life. One need not be strong or agile to incorporate this gentle and loving philosophy into their life. Love thy enemy ... and resolve the conflict before anyone needs to turn the other cheek.

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