

The Oneness of Aikido and Buddhism

After drastic ideological reforms in the Meiji, Taisho, and Showa eras, Japanese martial arts today are regarded as a form of sports or physical education. However, *budo* or *bushido* “the martial way” was traditionally not just an art of self-defense, but a system of self-understanding and spiritual development rooted in Buddhism and Shinto. Aikido, as one of Japan’s most well-known *budo*, also stems from this root. There are many schools of Aikido with varying techniques and interpretations. However, they share the common idea of utilizing “Aiki” to neutralize force and controlling one’s opponent. Aiki is often defined as “the integration of *ki* (気) ‘energy’ between heaven and earth”.

I would like to fine-tune this definition by explaining Aikido as “the way of integrating one’s will with the *ki* of heaven and earth”, because Aiki must begin with the unification of one’s body and mind. The “mind” here in Buddhist terminology, refers to *jiko* (自己) “self-mind”, and not *jiga* (自我) “ego-mind”. How is it possible to connect with nature without first integrating the self?

Born and raised in a temple, my relationship with *budo* began as a child when I was forced to take up Iaido and Aikido at our main hall. After becoming a Buddhist priest, I continued my practice and gradually realized the true profundity of *aiki*. I eventually received my status as a *shihan* “master” and started my own dojo 20 years ago. Many people regard the mastery of Aiki as difficult and complex, however, my Buddhist understanding has informed otherwise. Aiki is accessible to anyone.

Contrary to the axiom that mind precedes body and brain commands muscles; in Buddhism, we view mind and body as one - “*shinshinichinyo*” (心身一如). Within the mind, *jiga* thinks in separation — it is illusive, assertive, and wants to be perceived as superior; *jiko* is the integrative Buddha-mind that sees things as a whole — it is respectful, honest, self-less and grounded. Unaware of this dichotomy, most people are dominated by the ego-mind.

Aikido is a unique system of integrating the mind and body. Since our mind is in a constant flux and the mind-body being one, thus our mental state is constantly reflected in the body. The true purpose of Aikido’s *waza* training of grabbing one another’s arm — apart from learning distance control and self-defense — is to learn how to subdue *jiga* which tends to restrain and wants to collide with the opponent; and awaken *jiko* by learning how to connect with our opponents. *Ki* is transmitted between two practitioners through various Aiki *waza* (技) “techniques”.

Buddhism teaches that everything is interconnected through the Law of Cause and Effect. Regardless of whether an incoming karma is good or bad, one must learn to convert it into a positive outcome. This is the quintessence of *zenchishiki* (善知識) “wise knowledge” as taught in the Lotus Sutra. To be aware of one’s *jiga*, cultivate one’s *jiko* and integrate the whole- this is the essence of Aikido and the key to world peace.

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