

AIKIDO: A TOOL FOR SENSIBLE LIVING AND HEALING IN A VIOLENT WORLD

This article was prepared by Paul de Beer from South Africa.

He has been a student of aikido and a dedicated pioneer of South African aikido for the past 35 years. He writes as follows:

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I feel honoured to be connected to your Federation through my friendship with Tony Smibert Shihan and George Lo Sensei. Smibert sensei kindly asked me to share some of my thoughts on this forum and it is my pleasure to do so as an extended member of the International Aikido family.

I became the unfortunate victim of a violent armed attack which happened in front of my house in Menlo Park, Pretoria earlier this year. The incident forced me to do a lot of questioning and introspection.

The criminals started their senseless killing spree a few blocks away from my house. It was late January 2012. They first shot and permanently maimed a neighbour, then fled the scene and came pass my house as I returned home from Aikido practice that evening. As I was getting out of my car in the dark I was struck over the head, knocked unconscious and summarily shot. My forehead was smashed, my left ring finger broken and the humerus of my upper right arm shattered. After four operations I am recovering well and hope to be back on the tatami in another six months! Unfortunately the mental scars and general anxiety this left on my family and community is not so easily healed.

By practicing a martial art we are expected to learn how to defend ourselves and by studying a Budo this notion and expectancy is raised to an even further level -- that of also defending our family and the broader community. The ultimate defence is therefore, arguably, to safeguard the perseverance of our race. To do this in a sustainable manner we obviously need to align ourselves closely with the universal laws of nature, live in harmony with one another and care after the environment. To promote Aikido as a way of harmony, we as practitioners each have a personal obligation to set an example for peaceful, happy and level-headed living.

I realised after the attack how blessed I am to be alive and to still have the basic functions of my arm and hand intact. I also regard the fact that I do not bear unnecessary grudges and do not suffer from fear or panic attacks after the incident as a wonderful gift. I would like to think that this can be partly attributed to my Aikido training and Budo-mentality?

Judging by the point of entry and trail the bullet left on my clothing, it is evident that Aikido saved my life that evening. The outcome was totally different from what we normally see in the movies, though: I was in an unconscious state and unable to overpower my attackers. However, because of my training, I subconsciously moved out of the line of fire (irimi style) and miraculously sidestepped a bullet that was intended for my heart. Unfortunately it was not the perfect technique and the bullet still managed to smash my trailing arm! ***This emphasises that we should never underestimate the importance of good basics, the aikido methods of engagement and proper ma-ai.....***

On a deeper level and after experiencing some life-changing encounters in hospital, the brilliance of O'Sensei's philosophy again shone through to me: I realised that to bring about meaningful and lasting change in South Africa and to counter the disrespect, misconceptions and hatred that are currently sparking high levels of brutality and murder, these delusions have to be rooted out at its origin. To match aggression with counter aggression is of no avail and to fence ourselves in is also not a permanent solution. The stream must be cleaned at the source and in this case it involves all the parties!

We need to become sincere and compassionate before we can gain any insight to make peace with, amongst others, the cultural differences that trouble human relations. In hospital I experienced how the motherly care of the nursing staff rubbed off and could miraculously bridge cultures and heal wounds. This made me realize that the spirit of loving kindness and loving compassion that we talk about in aikido is best explained by motherly care and the love for our children! It is this vital component that brings motivation and understanding to our work. It also brings deeper meaning when we share things with one another. It works through our deeds and through our techniques in the same way as the oxygen that feeds our blood!

Even though the church, schools and State /i.e. politicians are the custodians of a country's social health, we as individuals also have an obligation and equal influence to make a difference. As practitioners of Aikido we must develop the practice of harmony and respect in the dojo, then share it with our families and spread this emotion and compassion for God's creation in our daily encounters.....

In the words of O'Sensei:

"True budo is a work of love. It is a work of giving life to all beings, and not killing or struggling with each other. Love is the guardian deity of everything. Nothing can exist without it. Aikido is the realisation of love." and

"It is not for correcting others; it is for correcting your own mind."

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