

Aikido and Philosophy

During my early youth my mother decided it might be a good idea to enrol me in a judo club to learn some form of self-defence because I got bullied by some boys at school. My first Judo teacher was an elderly man which we children called 'Uncle Koen'. Luckily the atmosphere was friendly and encouraging so I soon practised three times a week. As a seven year old boy it brought me great joy and gave me mental and physical confidence. My mother had been right because my problems with the bullies were soon to be over. After four years our family moved to another part of the city. I tried to find a new interesting club but found none over there that ever suited me.

Much, much later after I had begun with my philosophy study at the University of Amsterdam I got involved with Aikido at the Cosmos dojo. Actually I had been attending classes at the University about Eastern Philosophies such as Buddhism, Hinduism and I had gotten intrigued by the Spirit of Zen-Buddhism. Instead of just academic analyses I thought it would be a good idea to do some sort of related physical or meditative practise. So I started attending yoga classes given by a Dutch lady. There were some very interesting exercises she showed us related with Aikido.

That's why in 1984 I decided to practice Aikido at the Cosmos dojo under guidance of Peter Bacas Sensei. For many years I have been a close student and like many others I got inspired by him to follow the 'path of Aikido'. Years later I accompanied him during some trips abroad where he promoted Aikido to a whole group of countries in Europe and Euro-Asia under guidance of Fujita Sensei. Together we have encountered many exciting and colourful adventures that still linger through my memories sometimes.

As a philosopher my interests are with classical philosophers such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Legend says it was Pythagoras who invented the

word 'philosopher' which means 'a friend of wisdom'. Instead of thinking we really own any true wisdom we should be modest enough to call ourselves just friends. In a famous dialogue of Plato called *Symposium* we can read the story told by Socrates who explains this concept using all sort of mythical metaphors. What does it mean to have no wisdom at all of ourselves but to be a 'friend of Wisdom'?

Socrates explains the word 'love' in this context: we love or desire all those things we do not actually have but of whom we have some sort of notion. We only desire those things that we do not know or do not have in our possession. You would not desire for water for instance if you had just quenched your thirst. So we do not exactly know what happiness is (who is 100% happy?) which doesn't mean that we do not have any idea at all what it should or could mean. Therefore the true philosopher will call himself a friend of wisdom because he realises that he has no wisdom at all. This explains Socrates' most famous statement that "he only knows he knows nothing at all". This realisation of his humble position is the incitement and positive start for a true search for wisdom.

This philosophical ideal also works out for Aikido and its spiritual search for harmony. We would never have to strive for harmony if we would have it within our possession. So the realisation of our lack of spiritual harmony will have to drive us into a dedicated search for harmony. That's why we ought to practise Aikido: we realise our lack of physical, mental and spiritual harmony and therefore we desire and strive for it. The moment we would find true harmony the need for Aikido would be gone. Truly this could be considered to be 'the path of Aikido'.

Finally it is interesting to look at the solution Socrates is telling his students about how to bring this long journey for wisdom to a possible success. The only solution is 'paideia'; the Greek word for education. Only if we start

very early in life with our physical, mental and spiritual education we have a bigger chance to ever reach this condition in later life.

This is one of the reasons behind my motivation to teach Aikido to children of a young age. To pass the flame our teachers gave us to the next generation. Philosophers call this 'flammae tradere'; passing the flame. Still as adults we should never forget that the only thing we know is that we know nothing. And that we will always need a spiritual path in our life such as Aikido to bring us a bit closer to the harmonious energy (Ki) that not only constitutes our own life but also supplies the whole Universe with its abounded energy of Life.

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