

Why is there no competition in aikido?

This question has been asked of me a number of times. The following is an article from the Hombu Dojo Newsletter.

Q: There are no competitions in Aikido. What, then, is the objective of Aikido?

A: There are a variety of Budo, or Martial Arts. Budo can be organised into 2 major groups: Shiai (Competition) Budo, and Kata (Form) Budo. Shiai, or Competition Martial Arts, are based on contests intended to determine winners and losers. The second type, Kata (Form) martial Arts, on the other hand, begin by establishing Tori (person throwing) and Uke (person being thrown) in order to then trade roles back-and-forth in the repetition of certain set basic forms (Kata or Katachi). Aikido may be classified as a member of this later group of Kata (Form).



Budo originated as techniques to inflict injury upon others. In order to convert such systems into sports contests, it is therefore necessary to remove all dangerous techniques and establish set rules so as to prevent serious injuries. "Winners" and "Losers" of such sports contests may only be established after a safe playing field has been created. Without such precautions, serious injuries, and even deaths, would result.

Aikido, on the other hand, retains many dangerous techniques, such as joint (Kansetsu) and striking (Ate) Waza. This is why contests are forbidden in Aikido. Should someone attempt to use an Aikido join or striking technique in, for example, a Judo or Sumo contest, he would be disqualified for infringing the rules.

For many martial arts that retain many such Ate or Kansetsu Waza, Kata or Katachi (Form) training is the best means of preventing injuries. Kata may also be regularly switched from left to right, thereby forcing one to develop moves that might not otherwise occur in contest-oriented training systems.

The above describes the various merits of Kata, or Katachi (Form) training from a physical standpoint. Next, I would like to make some observations from a spiritual perspective.

Not only contest martial arts, but all struggles for win/lose victories necessitate that participants have a fundamentally selfish heart burning with the desire to beat one's opponent. This serves as an incentive for the young, but we need to remember that we are already well into the era of the Grey Generation. The 'greying' of the population means that modern training methods are needed that help to prepare both the body and spirit and to bring together self and other into a single unified realm.

A related point is that Competition Martial Arts can realistically only be practised up to the age of 35 or so. In order for people to continue training to the age of 50, 60 and 70, it is necessary to adopt Kata (Katachi) practice methods, as these permit one to train at one's own pace.

The meaning of the above is that the objective of Kata (Katachi) style Budo training is not to achieve victory over somebody else, but to win over oneself. This, in turn, means that the main points of training lie in experiencing Uke, Tori, basic rhythms and Myomi (Wondrous Taste).

The reverse of the above is that Kata (Katachi) Budo training systems have the following inherent shortcomings. First, the loss of the real sense of battle through familiarity with one's partner. Second, the tendency towards dogmatic actions that result from the people becoming too egocentric. In order to avoid these two shortcomings, it is important to continually reflect upon oneself while controlling the self through training conducted with a serious attitude. In this sense, I believe that the total "Aikido-fication" of life is, in fact, the end-goal of Aiki training.

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