

On "Ki"

A Lecture by Toyoda Sensei

Everyone in martial arts knows the Japanese word *ki*, meaning "energy". It's the same as the Chinese word *chi*. In Chinese medicine they say that *ki* flows through the body in channels. In the martial arts, we try to develop our energy.

But I think that not many people understand it. They get stuck on this concept of energy, and it becomes some kind of ghost you chase after.

Especially in Aikido, we see people who have strange ideas: "I want to learn how to throw someone without touching them," or "I want to learn a spiritual martial art, not a physical one that involves violence or conflict."

Somehow people don't like to face the real situations of life. They want something exotic, as if our existence is not wonderful and mysterious enough.

Throwing someone without touching them, using only *ki* energy, might be possible. But don't you think you should learn how to throw someone the normal way first, using your whole body? Most people don't have the confidence, or the guts, to train hard and learn the techniques of martial arts. It's difficult work, and it takes a long time. So they invent some idea of an energy that will let them stay lazy and throw someone without touching them. Maybe they can even do it without standing up, and throw someone while they sit in their reclining chair watching TV!

I think that, if such abilities do exist, most people would have to train very severely and for very long to understand them. And even then, if you could do it, so what? You live in the mountains for 20 years eating only pine needles and doing breathing exercises, you discover that you can do some strange things, and then what good is it for people? You can throw people, so what?

Then after you return to society, you realize that no one else is at your level. You try and teach it, but no one wants to do what you did. They want a quick, easier method. That would be frustrating for you, don't you think? Maybe you can go on a talk show and make money with your new skill. Eventually you get old and die like everyone else. On your grave they can write, "Amazing Martial Artist". But what was it all for? You found a secret through hard work, but to everyone else it just becomes a fantasy, a delusion.

Even if we could do these kinds of miracles, we would have to be very careful about showing them. Most people would only be misled and harmed by them. It is true that when we learn how to use our whole existence correctly and with relaxation, there are interesting things that start to show. Eventually what you can do will seem extraordinary. But we shouldn't seek these things. To us, it should be ordinary and natural. These kinds of phenomenon have no value by themselves.

Now, regarding the people who come to martial arts looking for something non-violent: these are really confusing to me. That's like going to a calligraphy class looking for some kind of ideal calligraphy that doesn't involve writing on paper with a brush and ink.

Ink, brush, paper: that's what calligraphy *is*. Violence: that's what martial art techniques *are*. The nature of martial arts is facing violence. Martial arts techniques are violent. I don't care what anyone says, but Aikido techniques are not nice. If you throw someone, they might get hurt. If you have a high skill level, you can try not to hurt someone. But most people don't even develop the level of skill sufficient to throw anyone at all, other than cooperative partners in the dojo, so to talk about this higher level of control and mastery is pointless.

It's ok to be gentle and peaceful, and to desire that. But don't confuse the *training method* and *philosophy* of Budo, the Martial Way, with the *techniques* of martial arts. Our training method in Aikido, for example, is cooperation and harmony. I like that. It's important to help each other learn. Our philosophy in Aikido is not to harm others, to be moral, to defend others, to not fight. I also like that.

But if violence does come, we can't avoid it. We say we 'harmonize' with conflict...but that doesn't mean avoid it! We face it squarely. We acknowledge it. We don't run away. Then, because of our training, we have a chance to harmonize with it and end it. And hopefully no one gets hurt. We have to be strong!

But the techniques themselves are not non-violent. Techniques, actually, are very refined and researched violence. They are concentrated. That's how they get passed on to each generation.

I don't know where these strange ideas of non-violent martial arts came from. Maybe it was when Aikido arrived in California. Don't tell my students in California I said that! (laughs)

In the same way, some people want to avoid the body and find something higher called ki. But ki *is* the body. This body *is* ki. Everything is ki. Physics tells us that everything is energy. But instead of this, we want something exotic and special that is apart from reality. Aikido people hold out their arms and make them unbendable, saying that it's the ki energy flowing through that makes this happen. That is a useful teaching device, but that's all. Don't get stuck on it. Your arm *is* the energy. Even if there's some kind of energy flowing in your arm like water in a hose, it is not apart from your body. The body and the mind, the body and energy, my body and your body, physical and spiritual - all of these are not different, not at all!

I hope everyone can become strong Aikidoists with sharp, crisp, strong technique. Because *you* chose to study Aikido. I didn't force you...we just make people pay monthly dues while they're here! (laughs) I also hope that you will understand the deeper applications of martial art principle and philosophy, which is our way of life and goes beyond situations of violence and offense/defense. But don't make the mistake of

looking for that depth and spirituality outside of the offense/defense situation. You chose martial arts as your path, so that is where you must find it. We become strong, and *that* is why we can talk about peace.

If you don't like those offense/defense situations and they make you uncomfortable, well, good! You're in the right place! Face it here in the dojo, and beat that fear. There's a lot of violence in the world, and you should learn how to not be afraid. That's enough reason for you to be here with us studying Aikido.

But if someone really can't handle it, don't say that our way of practicing is wrong, and don't create in your head fantasies about "non-violent arts of harmony" or "ki energy" or other kinds of magic. Just admit that you just don't like martial arts. You can study calligraphy or tea ceremony instead, if they suit your character better.

Calligraphy and tea ceremony are excellent arts. There is a path or Way that suits everyone! That's why we have many activities at this dojo. Anyone should be able to come here and find their path of training to refine themselves and become stronger. I just recommend for people to choose the right one.

And that is usually the one that makes you a little uncomfortable.

- Lecture given in personal conversation to M. Moore