

合氣道

History of Aikido

It is difficult to speak with certainty about the very early history of Aikido. The first important figure in the history of Aikido was Minamoto no Yoshimitsu (1045–1127).

At this point in the development of Japanese military arts, mounted archery was considered more important than swordsmanship. It is said that Yoshimitsu dissected cadavers to increase his understanding of the workings of bone, muscle and connective tissues. From this research he added to his repertoire of unarmed techniques, then called “Tai Jutsu.”

Yoshimitsu moved to the mountainous Kai region of Japan, and eventually his great-grandson founded a new clan with the name Takeda. The Takedas refined the techniques handed down from Yoshimitsu in the face of constant warfare. A manuscript, dating from around 1580, illustrates techniques which are recognizable to today’s Aikido practitioners.

During the Tokugawa period (1603–1868), certain combat arts were available only to high-ranking retainers and were called Otome Ryu or secret techniques. One of these secret arts was the Takeda clan’s style of unarmed defense, called Aiki-jujutsu. Jujutsu means “pliable techniques” and is used to describe various unarmed combat styles. “Aiki” at this point meant something like “coming together with ki or spiritual energy, of one’s enemy.” The concept of aiki was still very much within the context of warfare, and destroying one’s opponent.

Perhaps the greatest practitioner of Aiki-jujutsu was Sokaku Takeda (1860–1943). As a child he was interested only in the martial arts. By 1889 he had completed his study of Aiki-jujutsu.

O’Sensei Morihei Ueshiba (1883–1969) is the founder of modern Aikido. In 1912, he led a party of home-steaders from Tanabe north to settle the distant frontier lands of Hokkaido. In 1915 Sokaku Takeda was conducting a demonstration in Hokkaido. It was there that Ueshiba encountered Sokaku Takeda, and was easily defeated by a fifty-seven-year-old man who was less than five feet tall. Ueshiba was overwhelmed by the Aiki-jujutsu technique he witnessed.

Ueshiba invited Takeda Sensei to his home and built a training hall for him. For four years he studied the old techniques of Aiki-jujutsu, until his father’s illness called him back to Tanabe.

O’Sensei Ueshiba is the man who transformed the deadly techniques of Takeda Aiki-jujutsu into a peaceful way of harmony; from a means to destroy one’s enemy into a means to resolve conflict. The contrast between Aiki-jujutsu and Aiki-do is mirrored in the contrast between Bu-jutsu, military techniques focusing on practical results, and Bu-do, the code of

conduct focusing on character and ethics.

Throughout O’Sensei’s training as a martial artist, he never lost his interest in religion and spirituality. As he grew older, religious ideas exercised an increasingly profound influence over him. The old Aiki-jujutsu techniques had been born in an era of blood and violence; he worked to transform them into a way, or “do”, of education that fostered respect and harmony. No longer was the focus of training solely on self-defense and the destruction of one’s opponent.

“Aiki” took on a new meaning, moving beyond the notion of harmony with the energy of one’s opponent in combat, to embrace the notion of harmony with all things at all times; harmony with the universe. When one has achieved such harmony, there is no longer any enemy. O’Sensei Ueshiba called his new study Aiki-do.

History of Kinokawa Aikido

Sensei Michael Wirth began his Aikido training in Sensei Maruyama’s Arch St. Dojo in Philadelphia in April, 1972. He was then a young man of 24 with some Tae Kwon Do training (from S. Henry Chi, in Manhattan) and many street fights in his past. The grace and power he witnessed in his first few hours at the dojo drew him into the way of Aikido.

In those early days they spoke little and trained very hard. There were only a few students who endured for long.

Sensei Maruyama was a student of Koichi Tohei and O’Sensei. By 1971, two years after O’Sensei’s death, divisions of viewpoint regarding who was to lead Aikido and how it was to be conveyed and directed lead to a split between Tohei and Kisshomaru Ueshiba, the Founder’s son. Maruyama Sensei aligned himself with Sensei Tohei, and so it was that Sensei Wirth’s practice in the 1970s reflected both the early style and training of O’Sensei as preserved and conveyed by the Aikikai, and the flowing late-life Aikido of O’Sensei presented by Sensei Tohei.

In 1980 Sensei Maruyama moved to Nagoya Japan, leaving senior students to run his two Philadelphia dojos. The next few years brought a slow but steady growth to these schools and the blossoming of a division between Senseis Tohei and Maruyama. By 1985, these two extraordinary men were no longer working together.

Sensei Maruyama founded Kokikai as a vehicle for Aikido fundamentally and stylistically true to Tohei’s. As Kokikai continued to grow, Sensei Wirth opened Kokikai dojos in Reading, Pottstown, and Norristown. During this time, differences between Sensei Maruyama’s Kokikai, and Sensei Wirth’s style were becoming apparent. By 1991, Sensei Wirth’s schools were operating independently from the Kokikai organization, and they were given the name Kinokawa, “River of ki”.