

Welcome to my home



A long time ago, I was told that the kanji for the Ai, harmony, in Aikido represented one family living under one roof. This evoked a wonderful, dynamic image, with all the give and take and blending of different individuals that make any house a home. When I tried to look for documentation of this etiology, however, I found that the character was usually said to be based upon a pot with a well-fitting lid. Well, lids may fit, but they are inanimate, inflexible, dead. Although this explanation may be more historically correct, I prefer to visualize the former image, of Ai as a harmonious home. And that home is filled with playing children and sunshine and the aromas of cooking rice and fresh mown grass, and maybe a little wet dog. It is filled with life and life energy, or Ki, all blending under that one roof.

This more vibrant image of harmony and Aiki leads to a way of looking at the roles of nage and uke as hosts and guests in a home. In Aikido, nage does not merely receive uke's attack, like a lid clunking onto a pot. Nage, as host, begins comfortably settled in his home, then opens the door and reaches out to welcome uke, his guest, with generosity and joy. Uke, in turn, does not approach warily; he exuberantly accepts the host's invitation, entering wholeheartedly, offering a gift. Nage receives his guest and whatever he has brought, helping him to come in and sit down for a peaceful, relaxed visit. Now, if the guest were to be less friendly, he could come bearing a nasty letter or even a knife or a baseball bat and no baseball. It is still offered exuberantly, without hesitation. Nothing in the gracious host's reception need change. Nage is always settled, grounded, "at home" and actively invites and welcomes uke's committed attack, then guides him safely to a peaceful resolution.

In Aikido training, assuming an attitude of generosity and joy can have the effect of changing my entire bearing, much more than simply placing my arms and feet in a given position. This applies as both nage and uke. Such an attitude helps to counter any tendency to hold back, with hesitant movements and a closed posture, or to aggressively or awkwardly fling myself through space. It balances and harmonizes me with my body and with my partner.

Beyond helping my training in the dojo, this approach extends into my life as a whole. When I try to stay settled and at peace in my own space, and actively welcome others into my home and life, to share a steaming pot of rice, perhaps, then my life is that much better, as is that of my entire family.

My interpretation of the Ai kanji may or may not be historically accurate, but I believe the conception of Aiki as a home filled with generosity and joy is consistent with the philosophy of Aikido. Describing his first transformative vision, at the age of 42, O Sensei was quoted as saying, "All at once I understood the nature of creation: the Way of a Warrior is to manifest Divine Love, a spirit that embraces and nurtures all things. Tears of gratitude and joy streamed down my cheeks. I saw the entire earth as my home, and the sun, moon, and stars as my intimate friends. All attachment to material things vanished." If I could ever truly, consistently, maintain this attitude of generosity and joy in all of my interactions, when my body, my dojo, my home

and my world are all the happy, harmonious places I would like them to be, maybe then I would no longer need to train. But then, of course, I would continue anyway, because Aikido is my home and where I choose to live.

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