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Nice Aikido by **David M. Valadez**

Issue Raised:

My Aikido skills alone were not enough to deal with 6 to 8 attackers - many armed. I had to resort to my other martial arts skills simply to save my life. Is this wrong? In my experience, the person doing the attacking has a strong will to hurt or even to kill you. Thus, I felt fully justified in using any means at my disposal to save my life. Of course, ideally, I'd like to use "nice" Aikido, but let's be realistic, would an Aikido Master truly abide by the basic principles of the Art if in such life-threatening a situation?

Presently, I am beginning training in a different style of Aikido. My present goal is no longer to train mainly for self-defense. I am more interested in being able to relax, finding some inner peace, and getting fit. I do love Aikido as an art though - but ultimately, how practical is it in "real life" attacks?

Response:

Certainly not a master, and hoping never to conceive of myself as one, may I say...

I think there are some distinctions made in your perceptions of what Aikido is and is not that are not held by everyone that practices the art. Since many of your questions arise from these distinctions, not everyone holds your questions as meaningful (i.e. semiotically speaking). Aikido is many things to many people, if you will allow me to state the obvious. Moreover, almost anyone can find any rationale for what they are practicing by looking to the Founder's life. This self-legitimizing practice increases even more when we are allowed to look to the shihan that are teachers nowadays.

For me, I do consider myself a practitioner of Aikido. Yet, I do not draw a line, or hint at a line, between martial effectiveness and spiritual cultivation – let alone a line between martial effectiveness and street effectiveness (which some wish to draw as well). I do not feel I have left the "boundaries" of Aikido because I have used kicks, strikes, chokes, ground fighting, or even weapons in my training and/or in any tactical environment of one kind or another. Nor do I feel that self-defense situations that are forced upon me, for one reason or another (assuming that no reason points to my fault, morally speaking), place my practicing of Aikido in a precarious position – one whereby it may risk its own identity. In addition, I do not hold that Aikido kihon waza curriculum encapsulates the art as a whole, let alone defines it. Some buy what I just said. Some do not. Some buy parts of it. Aikido has not been universally defined and probably will never be.

Allowing for variations in understandings and applications of Aikido, noting the huge differences one can justify by looking to the life of the Founder, and recognizing that viewpoints on what the art is and/or is not are as varied as the number of shihan teaching (of course it is more), perhaps your question can be asked a bit differently. Assuming I understand your question, perhaps you are asking, “Is there a way that one can face multiple attackers and apply tactical architectures that nullify an opponent’s will and/or capacity to attack but not injure them in the least (or only in a minor way)?”

Answering that question, I suppose we can say “yes,” but only theoretically. It would seem the human factor, which addresses acquired skills, and not merely ideal architectures, would make such a feat highly unlikely. For example, imagine yourself being attacked by six to eight children – say ages two to five. While you may come out unscathed, and your intention may be to simply deflect and avoid, that many bodies heading in a single direction with a single intention will sooner or later run into some sort of opposing mass (e.g. each other, the ground, a wall, your own body, etc.). When this happens, the physics present are more primed for human injury than they are for human safety. Such things have to be exponentially increased when we are dealing with adult attackers – undoubtedly.

This would lead one to hold that another solution is in order, should one take seriously the premise of non-violence and/or of working toward the continuous welfare of our fellow Man – which are ideals held up by Aikido. In other words, the best way of not injuring six to eight attackers is to be not in a place where they are attacking you. This of course can be thought of as involving the “retreat” or the “runaway,” but more than that, I think it has to include living the right kind of life; practicing right speech, right thought, and right action, etc. It would involve living life in such a way that the likelihood of facing such an encounter becomes as rare as the chance of injuring a fellow Man within such an encounter is likely. Under that kind of understanding, which I consider a very profound, wise, and deep understanding, we would have to say that many people (aikidoka and non-practitioners alike) are able to practice these relative Budo tenets quite expertly. We should do the same.