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## **The Uniqueness of Aikido** by David M. Valadez

The reasonable man can always mark differences without the need to condemn any one difference under another. Therefore, noting the uniqueness of something should not be an act that we should a priori link with being unreasonable, with being judgmental, and/or with condemnation. We can say that Aikido is unique without saying that everything else is of no value.

That the Founder believed his art to be unique is beyond dispute. For example, he writes:

“The ‘aiki’ of which conventional martial artists spoke and the ‘aiki’ of which I speak are fundamentally different in both essence and substance. It is my sincere hope that you will ponder this deeply.”

That difference, that which we are advised to ponder over deeply, is found within the way that Osensei’s martial praxis was combined with his personal religiosity. The Founder, at his time, was quite alone when he flavored his martial arts training not solely with the traditional Buddhist, Confucian, and Shinto elements, things nearly every other art did. He was unique when he used the already eclectic discourse of Omoto-kyo theology to provide the voice for his already personally eclectic beliefs. He, like the New Religion Omoto-kyo, and his art, were saying things and combining things in revolutionary ways. Borrowing heavily from Omoto-kyo, he marked his art and his training as completely distinct from what came before (at least in regards to what we are mostly aware of) when he said:

“Aikido is not the art of fighting using brute strength or deadly weapons, or the use of physical power or deadly weapons to destroy one’s enemies, but a way of harmonizing the world and unifying the human race as one family. It is a path of service that works through the spirit of God’s love and universal harmony by the fulfillment of each individual’s respective role.” (emphasis added)

Most techniques of Aikido are found in other arts. Most arts can readily agree with what is said above but not underlined. However, when Osensei said that Aikido was “a way of harmonizing the world and unifying the human race as one family,” that it is “a path of service that works through the spirit of God’s love and universal harmony by the fulfillment of each individual’s respective role,” he was describing his art in ways not used before. No one was talking like that at that time (even today, few do – even within Aikido!). No one combined a given set of techniques, a given way of training, a universal deity whose primary characteristic is Love, with a sense of having a mission in one’s life such that one is surrounded by divineness all around and within. Together, these elements mark Aikido’s uniqueness.

In the face of all the other divergent and various expressions of the art that we see today (those things that one is able to do with Aikido's techniques, with the training, with the philosophy, etc., in apparently independent ways), an aikidoka should always return to this combination of elements that truly mark Aikido as unique. For if not, the core message of Aikido will never be pondered over deeply enough – never deeply enough to understand what is Aikido and what is not Aikido.