

## TECHNIQUES OF DESTRUCTION, TECHNIQUES OF HARMONY

*This is an extract from "Children and the Martial Arts - an Aikido Perspective" by Gakku Homma. It gives parents a good idea of what we are trying to achieve with the junior Aikido classes.*

Following warm-up exercises and the practice of break-falls, we begin the practice of techniques. I feel it is important for parents to examine why they want their children to learn a martial art. One reason can be that they have seen martial arts heroes on TV or in the movies, and want their children to emulate these heroes. In the typical martial arts movie the bad guys pick on good citizens. They push them around and abuse them until the good guys can no longer take it. Just when their tolerance has reached its limits, a hero turns up to take care of the bad guys. Bruce Lee rips his shirt; the Hulk turns into a green monster; Superman, Rambo, Zorro come to the rescue; the Karate Kid beats up the Bad Kid.

All heroes are pretty much the same. They punish evildoers. When they come to the rescue, the audience claps and cheers. People identify with them. These movies make people feel that they too are heroes. Parents sometimes imagine their children as potential heroes.

In Hollywood, it's superior violence that overcomes evil. But the real world is very much different to the world portrayed in martial arts movies. How often do newspapers run a story about criminals getting caught, beaten up and captured by a spur-of-the-moment hero? Not very often. In the real world, the bad guys are criminals, and their victims are simply victims. Criminals do not go looking for a hero when they seek out a victim. They prey on ordinary people. When they strike Superman and Bruce Lee do not turn up. These heroes exist only in our imaginations.

Many people decide to study the martial arts with the illusion that some day they'll have a chance to be a hero. Martial arts magazines are full of adverts for deadly weapons that show ordinary people using them to subdue their attackers. Some parents see their children in these ads and imagine them fighting off a gang of bullies using their martial art skills.

Think about it for a moment. Would you really want your child to challenge a group of gang members? A few martial art classes will not turn your child into a superhero. Martial arts training does not make a child invincible. Do you want your child to learn to punch and kick his or her way out of trouble? Children who learn to respond to problems with violence become violent children. Is this what parents want? I do not think so.

Regardless of the circumstances, nobody, especially children, should resort to violence to solve their problems. Avoiding violence is at the heart of Aikido, as it is in Judo. Neutralising an attacker, not punishing, injuring, or killing is the goal of Aikido and judo techniques. Aikido and Judo students do not respond to attacks with kicks and punches. Aikido and Judo techniques do not result in

intentional injuries. If you can first neutralise an attacker, then you can reason with them.

The Japanese martial arts known as Budo, which were developed by the Samurai class, taught that violence was not an appropriate response to violence. They were developed as a method to control violent situations, to replace violence with non-violence. Avoiding and eliminating violence were the goals. The techniques that were taught and used reflected a non-violent attitude. The Samurai learnt to respond to negative actions with positive e actions.

When Aikido students practise Aikido techniques, there are no "good guys" or "bad guys". There are simply two partners working together. Their goal is to master a technique by blending their movements and harmonising each other's energy. Their goal is not to conquer, but to co-operate. This is why there are no tournaments in Aikido as we teach it.

How can we blend with each other? This is the question that Aikido students are constantly trying to answer. When two students practise a technique, their common goal is to harmonise their movements. When they achieve that goal, both students have succeeded. One of the underlying premises of junior Aikido classes is that the primary purpose of martial art training is not self-defence that uses violence to combat violence. On the contrary, the goal is to teach children how to get along with each other, how to avoid violence.

Children have naturally competitive spirits. Aikido training provides away for children to exercise this competitive spirit in a positive, socially acceptable manner, with no violence whatsoever. Aikido practice develops children who do not resort to violence when confronted with a problem; children who are able to get on with other children.

When children practise techniques with one another, the attacks occasionally involve kicks and punches. These strikes provide an opportunity for the children to practice Aikido responses. The emphasis is on the response, not on the attack. The students never respond to the punch or kick another punch or kick. Aikido students learn that the most important response to a punch is to get out of the way. Once that has been accomplished, they use Aikido techniques to bring their attacker under control. The aggressor is neutralised, not by destructive force, but by calm, circular movements. By practising smooth, flowing Aikido movements over and over, children learn to move fluidly and to stay calm under pressure.

Aikido student do not learn how to be heroes. Instead they learn how to make friends and avoid making enemies. A child who is a friend to many and has no enemies will likely be a happy child. If, on top of that, the child is healthy, he or she has everything a parent could hope for. It is my hope that Aikido training helps to develop this kind of child.