

Inner harmony

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(An excerpt from Iron Balls and Elbow Power by Nick Waites. This book captures the teachings of Shihan Terry Ezra Sensei, Birkenhead, England.)

'In aikido the ki of the individual self becomes unified with the ki of the entire universe. We ourselves must ceaselessly work to realise this union.' - Morihei Ueshiba

The system of aikido to which Essani introduced me is based on the aikido ideal of harmony with nature and natural forces. In particular it is concerned primarily with creating unity within oneself, and subsequently between oneself and an attacker. Initially, when learning any new physical skill, our bodies try to continue performing familiar movements while our minds try to make our bodies perform unfamiliar movements. This creates a tension that only begins to disappear through constant repetition. Essani's system makes us acutely aware of our own physical/mental state so that we are able to recognise unnecessary tension. Once that sensitivity to what the Chinese call 'qi stagnation' is established, further training can work towards removing it. Through constant monitoring of simple movements and exercises we become sensitised to unnecessary tension, and we learn to release it. Eventually, optimum relaxation replaces instinctive but ineffectual body states and establishes itself as a learned instinctive behaviour.

Harmony within oneself leads to a sensitivity to an opponent's weaknesses. Rather than being preoccupied with the need to overpower an opponent, we develop the ability to identify an opponent's intention and attune ourselves to it. Then, together, we find a way to dissipate the attack harmlessly. It becomes rather like dancing with a slightly reluctant partner.

The emphasis on harmonious interactions between ourselves and attackers requires that we become aware of our instinctive need to oppose attackers' intentions. We learn to meet and join with an attack rather than to block it and force it into a new direction. For example, when an opponent grabs my wrist as a precursor to striking me with the other hand or a foot, my natural reaction might be to break the grip by pulling away from it. This gives my attacker energy to oppose and overpower, leading to a struggle between two opposing forces. Essani teaches that in this circumstance I must align my grasped arm so that it becomes an extension of my opponents arm. Then, my neutralisation of his technique will give him nothing to oppose since he will not be conscious of any interruption to his attack.