



EMOTIONAL AIKIDO: The Language of the Heart and Hara

Aikido contains its own embodied compassionate communication that can enable greater intimacy with those we live and work with. Training teaches us to listen in three dimensions. We think, we feel and we intuit. Our minds want to get to the point, our hearts yearn to open, and from our center we seek the depth of the unknown.

When O'Sensei said Aikido was "A way to reconcile the world," I believe he meant for us to begin with our inner world. Some situations call to our mind, some speak to our heart and others to our hara. The only way to know the prevalence of one intelligence, or to discover when two or more are in accord is to practice listening for their distinct voices. Heads discern, hearts feel, and hara abides with intuitive wisdom.

Acceptance:

It is the nature of mind that it always has a point of view. All the "others" seem challenging. Only by training and practice do we learn to "take a grab or strike as a gift." And so it is with receiving another viewpoint. By accepting things as they are we can seek center and blend. So I begin discussing the language of Aikido by having a receptive mind. I know my view, and I welcome yours.

Compassion:

The head issues judgments and "knows" this and that. My heart "feels" compassion and empathy for self and others. Feeling *with* another extends this acceptance and creates possibilities for blending. Emotional awareness has dimension. Compared to the linear mind, emotional intelligence has the beginnings of shape, the essential language of Aikido.

Breath:

Before being imbued with words, does breath have intelligence? In the heat of conflict we say "breathe," not "speak." Breath has shape and movement. Wind swirls; it doesn't have a point. We enter another kind of knowing, a wordless wisdom one step removed a step from the mind.

Ground:

In the conflict we say, "don't get riled-up..." and "settle down." We train to calm the turbulent emotions by dropping attention even further in order to allow the clarity of deeper truths to emerge. The language of hara emanates from center when our field of attention behind and beneath us equals the awareness of what is above and before us. It has weight and depth, through which we intuit our core interests and needs that remain hidden to the judgments of the mind and the passions of the heart. In between right and left our center speaks of our connection with the planet. Hara gives us perspective on our impassioned righteousness. Feeling gravity may be listening to Earth's voice.

Presence:

Showing up fully is being able to speak our core needs even when they contain divergent pulls from head/heart/hara. It requires courage and humility to say when the mind differs with the heart, and wisdom to recognize intuitively when our emotions and intentions align with our core interests. There are occasions when *not knowing* may be the sign of maturity, when showing up fully is sufficient. If we can feel from our core, we can find the words to speak its truth.

Extension:

Extension rests upon the foundation of finding center and feeling ground. Extension is our way of knowing that nothing, even a direct attack, need be taken personally. Attacks contain the gift of knowing that we have the challenger's full attention. The attacker is off balance by nature, being out of harmony with the universe. Extension enlarges us from the core, to meet another with appropriate boundaries at the perimeter of our expanded presence. There center knows no limits and two can become one.

Connection:

Somatic attunement and self-preparation enable relationship with another with appropriate boundaries, in harmony with nature and our shared purposes. We train in order to find one another in peaceful union, meeting and resolving separation in that field beyond right and wrong.

Blending:

Acceptance, receiving adversity, empathy, ground and center all prepare us to speak and act in harmony with another. Aikido's gift to a world in need of reconciliation, *the blend* enables alignment with the views of others before seeking resolution. Energy follows attention. Practicing *aiki* – the blending of energy – will find its way into right speech and right action.

Conclusion:

In the dojo, we practice being aware of head/heart/hara as related components each having its own weight and distinct centers of gravity. We learn how aligning ourselves receives pressure gracefully and resolves physical conflict peacefully. May we practice this everywhere. May we put *aiki* -this blending spirit- into words and discover compassionate communication involving choices, requests, collaboration and the making and changing of agreements.

Somatic attunement keeps mind on the matter; the language of heart and hara is Aikido's alternative to word-wars, and our contribution to reconciling the world.

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