

# HEIWA SHUGI RYU-AIKIDO



**Heiwa Shugi Ryu-aikido is:**

- ... the aikido created by **Peter Van de Ven**
- ... a new and modern aikido for the **21<sup>st</sup> century**
- ... a peaceful aikido in view of **self-care**
- ... a martial art-practice as a kind of **adult culture-participation**
- ... a **civil** martial art-practice for **self-cultivation**
- ... a kind of **culture of peace**

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## **Setting**

### ***Aikido as combat technique***

Aikido is known as a martial art of Japanese origins in which the defender principally uses throws and joint-locks to secure himself. As a result of the historical evolution of aikido, the general concept “aiki-do” has multiple meanings, which causes confusion and misunderstandings. The reason for this ambivalence is simple: both of the concepts “aiki” and “do” can have a completely different sense because of the historical development of martial arts.

Historically, “aikido” originally referred to mere unarmed combat-technique. As such, aikido is part of a comprehensive martial art-school (“ryu”) which covers armed techniques besides unarmed ones, such as sword or spear mastery, each of these arts with its own genuine name.

In this context, “aiki” stands for a long-standing martial art notion which signifies “synchronising with the opponent’s movement”. It appears for the first time around 1800 in the martial art-literature of the Takeda-clan, a prominent Japanese family for centuries. They spoke about “Aiki In no Yo”, the “aiki of yin and yang”. Later, the concept was further elaborated, and the Takeda-masters defined ai-ki as the opposite of ki-ai, the martial shout used to impress and intimidate opponents, and to develop energy within the techniques.

“Aiki”, synchronisation, joins the notion of “ju”, soft yielding, but it is not the same. Some techniques (jutsu) are aiki, others are ju, and still others are both. Hence the name “aiki jujutsu”, sometimes shortened to “aikido”. As a result of intensive training and centuries-long experience during the shogunate, also under

influence of the Chinese wushu, these “aiki”- and “ju”-techniques developed into a startlingly high-standing martial ability.

The unarmed combat-techniques were not only part of the samurai-education to defend themselves against the aggression of their peers, the other samurai, but they were also used to arrest criminals. Not just the army, but also the police force consisted solely of samurai: their mission was to control criminals without the use of excessive violence.

Hence, it is not surprising that aikido - in view of all the above - approached as a mere combat technique is today partially trained for physical security and law-enforcement. Further, because the use of swords is forbidden in contemporary civil life, sword-attacks have been substituted by attacks with one’s bare hands, and moreover, any martial art viewed as a mere combat-technique is principally somewhat instrumental. As a result, the step in the direction of competition is quickly made, and in this way aikido-practice can easily change into a demonstrational or fighting sport. But, in extreme cases, because of its emphasis on physical security and law-enforcement, this kind of aikido-practice can become part of the imaginary reality of rightwing ultra-nationalists who cherish paramilitary and home guard-fantasies.

Nevertheless, most of aikido (aiki jujutsu) schools want to go beyond mere training in unarmed combat-technique. They view training as character-building and as a means to make a positive contribution to society. To which kind of society they want to contribute, however, is not mentioned, which shows again that in this approach the art does not leave the clean instrumental way.

This instrumental approach of aikido as combat-technique or as character-training became problematic around 1930, when Japan engaged itself into imperialism and militarism. Many Japanese martial art masters, even though they were mostly conservative patriots, looked powerlessly upon the army leaders who put martial art-practice in function of modern warfare. Jigoro Kano, the creator of modern judo, was devoted to harmonious international relations and was an outspoken adversary of this militarism.

The aiki-jujutsu teacher Morihei Ueshiba has been recuperated by rightwing militarists and ultra-nationalists, which brought him into bad company (such as ultra-nationalist gangsters of the Kokuryukai and its top-figure Mitsuru Toyama, amongst others), but in the end he got fed up with their fanaticism. Around 1937 he severed all connections with his teacher Sokaku Takeda, as well as with his religious sect-leader Onisaburo Deguchi and with the influential Inoue’s, his family in law (his nephew was his keen assistant), although he continued to believe in the divine origin of “the Japanese race”. A bit later he retreated to the country-side. These severed connections were never restored.

### ***Aikido as an art of peace***

After the end of WO II, and encouraged in this by new students, Morihei Ueshiba related aikido-training to the general current of Japanese grassroots pacifism of that time. In the 1960ies the aikido of Morihei Ueshiba was picked up by pacifist

protests against the Vietnam-war and against nuclear proliferation. Because of the convergence of these three social currents (the rejection of militarism within martial art, the post-war Japanese and Western pacifism), the concept of aikido as an art of peace matured. Morihei Ueshiba and his acquaintances spoke of “the new budo”, wherein the principles of “no-damage”, “self-victory” (masagatsu agatsu) and “harmony” became important.

Aikido in this sense is no instrumental, mere unarmed combat technique, but a peace loving martial art. From now, “aiki” not only stands for synchronisation with the opponent but rather for “unification with the universe”, “do” not only refers to “technical study” but to the Chinese “tao”, “The Way”, and aikido becomes a martial art wherein both armed and unarmed techniques study the same principals. “Aikido” in this sense is no longer an abbreviation of “aiki jujutsu”, but of an “aiki budo” aimed at peace.

### ***Shortcomings and imperfections of the new aikido***

The new budo “aikido” is indeed very young. The concept “peace-loving martial art” became a fact, but the specific elaboration of the concept within the practice of the art still presented challenges. The application of the no-damage-principle to the aikido techniques remained unfinished.

The creation of a peaceful world community became the purpose of Morihei Ueshiba’s training, in particular by means of creating a humanity that consists of one great (and Japanese) global peace loving family. This brought about a somewhat religious, sectarian and utopian aspect: at least partially, the training of an art of peace became the reverence of a hierarchical person and peace cult with a strong emphasis on orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

Moreover, the image of humankind as one family originates from the State Shinto practice of idolising of the Japanese emperor, who is viewed by his subjects as a world wide family head. Just like the pre-war militarism, the post-war Japanese pacifism has imperialist traits, and so too the post-war aikido has in essence a Japanese-Japanese outlook.

Within the officially pacifist aikido currents, the distinction between aikido as combat-technique and aikido as peace loving martial art is not always well understood. Actually there exists a mixture, originating from two opposite directions: some “ordinary” jujutsu schools also developed a pacifist ideology, and within the “new” aikido schools the practitioners do not always pay due attention to the pacifist basics of the new martial art. In many cases a hybrid martial art originated with both ultra-nationalist and pacifist traits, depending upon the organisation of the training and upon the personal insight of the practitioners.

So, the aikido of and around Morihei Ueshiba was no “end of history” nor a “global undifferentiated unity”. On the contrary, it was solely a first, albeit very valuable step, and the ambiguity of the concept “aikido” brought about conflict and disagreement within the aikido-community.

In order to develop and to universalise aikido further as a peace loving martial art or “art of peace”, I created a new and modern aikido, an aikido for the 21st century, aimed at self-care and self-cultivation.

### ***The name***

Concluding the above, aikido has never been “one” , it always had multiple contents and meanings. An aikido-training which is “just aikido” does not exist. Every organisation has its style, its preferences, although sometimes they are not explicitly mentioned as such. This diversity is no problem in itself, if it can lead to enriching cooperation and mutual inspiration.

For the sake of honesty, and to make clear which kind of training we organise, I chose a specific name that reflects my purpose in my aikido-practice. This name is “HSR-aikido”, which is short for “Heiwa Shugi Ryu-aikido”.

Therein “Wa” refers to the oldest cultures of ancient Japan. They were lead by shaman-queens, of whom Himiko is the most noted. “Wa” also means “typically Japanese”, and “harmony”, because social harmony is a typically Japanese value. The reminiscence of the past and lost harmonious civilisation is probably what made “wa” to signify harmony.

“Hei” means “in spirit of” so “heiwa” refers to “in a spirit of harmony”, peace. Shugi means “daily technical practice”.

Heiwa shugi can be translated as “techniques of peace”. For instance, in the constitution of the post-war Japan, world peace is demanded as “sekai heiwa shugi”.

“Ryu” means “school”, as one speaks of “painting-school of Rubens” or as in the expression “making school”.

Japanese is somehow the standard language in aikido and so I thought it to be logical to choose a Japanese name. But you can use others. In English “Aikido school of lasting peace”, “Ecole d’aikido de paix durable” in French, in Dutch “Aikidoschool duurzame vrede”. However much universality we instill into aikido, its “roots” of course remain Japanese.

### ***The innovation***

#### ***Universalising aikido in a globalised world***

The philosophy of HSR-aikido is based on the changing, sometimes hard conditions of life caused by globalisation and the crises it brings about. In HSR-aikido we build self-strengthening and self-care as means to cope with the burden of this globalised world. It is a universal art, looking upon the future, reconciling tradition and modernity. In a broad sense, HSR-aikido is progressive and humanist.

HSR-aikido is a universalisation of aikido. We strip the art of its strictly Japanese character and although we consider Morihei Ueshiba to have been a very important figure in Japanese martial art history, whom we look upon with respect and gratitude, we don't think he deserves more credit than that: his work is inspiring but no benchmark.

We base our practice on the general human qualities, elaborating aikido as a universal art. In this way a modern, creative and natural aikido emerges, aiming at reconciliation of modernity and tradition. HSR-aikido is a form of martial art, rooted in the specific context of contemporary society, with non-violence and human well-being as its central idea.

In view of this universalisation it is necessary to contrast aikido as Japanese budo with the Chinese wushu, which, contrary to the socially controlling function of the Japanese martial arts, had a more rebellious character, and which was practised in secret societies, by men and women. This contrast makes one think on how martial art originally could have been before it got compromised by sexism and by the hostilities of bureaucratic state power. In this way I am able to determine and promote the concept of a society-critical and egalitarian "original martial art".

### ***Formulating a new definition***

First of all, to identify aikido without referring to its Japanese origin, nor to Morihei Ueshiba, we need a new definition of aikido, both instrumentally formulated and aimed at peace. In short, it boils down to aikido as a non-violent martial art which improves its practitioner's quality of life. The aikido-training is a means, aimed at increasing the well-being of the practitioners, their families and fellow men.

This means that we determine the ambition of aikido in a very modest and realistic way. We don't pursue utopian and grandiose designs. The purpose of our practise is the demonstrable self-improvement of the practitioners, and in so doing making a small contribution to the peaceful quality of our society. We view aikido as being just one of many arts of peace.

### ***Studying the origins of aikido historically***

Secondly, we revised the current mythical "creation narratives" of aikido from a social-historical perspective. This historical study confirms the mixed character of aikido because of the simultaneous presence of ultra-nationalist and pacifist elements, but this study also makes very clear that the art remains unfinished and needs further elaboration.

### ***Looking for a suitable training target***

Thirdly we chose a profane and civil interpretation of our practice. Family comes first: practitioners need to remind themselves constantly that they train for more well-being and not for vanity or egoistical self-indulgence.

### ***Defining a new philosophy of non-violence***

Fourthly we need to describe the basics of the art in a new philosophy of non-violence. This includes the development of eight pillars. We work at insight in human nature, which we view as limited and restricted, and somewhat helpless. From this understanding of human existential helplessness grows the consciousness of people needing each other and their being connected. This essentially human imperfection occasionally causes conflicts, and the challenge we face is how to cope with these conflicts without causing damage. To be up to this daily challenge, we take care of our health, and we believe in the necessity to distinguish truth and untruth. In addition, we need to develop some dignity to lead a morally justified life, inspired by compassion and voluntary simplicity. In this way we contribute to the safety of our society, and as a consequence we can live an untroubled peaceful life.

### ***Enriching our practice from the outside***

Finally, we enrich our practice with elements of other martial arts (e.g. wado ryu karate or wushu) to develop deeper insight and greater ability. We also study the technique and philosophy of “aikido-classics” and important historical martial art-figures, as well as concepts such as the Yagyu-shinkage “katsujinken”, the “Life-Giving Sword” of unsurpassed sword-masters like Nobutsuna Kamiizumi and Yagyu Muneyoshi.

## ***The training***

### ***A free choice of training outfit***

The practitioners are free in their choice of “training outfit” (on condition that it sufficiently protects them and does not hinder practise), so the traditional keiko-gi and hakama are not obligatory. This free choice of training outfit is the most apparent mark of HSR-aikido. In HSR-aikido we use no “dress code”. There is only one requisite: the outfit must be appropriate. This is consciously chosen to prevent militarism, nostalgia for feudalism, and tendency into conformism and uniformity on the one hand, and to promote free expression and universalisation on the other hand.

In addition, we don't use any formal gradings (so, no “belts”) but we do have a clear and constructive program of progress. The practitioners are divided in categories: beginners, practitioners, advanced practitioners and teachers. Because of this, the aikido-practise becomes aimed at ability, and again meets the requirement of universality.

## *Our 5 basic themes*

HSR-aikido comprises 5 basic themes which follow 10 lines of development.

The first theme is “philosophy and background”, to which I already referred. A practitioner needs insight in and comprehension of the art he practises. This includes philosophy of non-violence, the historical background of aikido, a new instrumental definition with quality of life at its centre, a vision on outfit, on etiquette and on aikido as a kind of self-care art.

The second theme is “creativity”. The aikidoka should learn how to develop (“learning how to learn”) by practise and by self-study. Basic abilities are crucial, as are the elaboration of these with a generative method. This means that we start practising just a few basic exercises and search new techniques by means of variation and common starting points. The program of progress and the practise obtained in this way acquires a tree-like structure. This method creates space for personal insight and creativity.

The third theme is “movement, posture and energy”. Learning how to move using the whole body, how to develop a natural posture and attitude, how to focus one’s energy and how to deal with the energy of the opponent are essential points of interest. Also there are patterns that bridge different techniques, and there is the integration of unarmed and armed techniques. So it is important to work at the origin of the technique. The HSR-aikido-techniques originate by making contact with the opponent from a natural posture. The extension, guiding and harmonising of energy are very important. Through adequate body-movement we develop patterns of movement which are multiply applicable. HSR-aikido-techniques are interactive. Sometimes we try to stimulate the opponent into an echo-like reaction in order to be able to guide him more appropriately. Entering, changing directions and spinning are typical basic abilities.

Learning basic aikido techniques, learning how to diversify these techniques, learning how to disarm, and learning how to practise with weapons, constitute the fourth theme. Here we focus on aikido as a kind of self-care and on the corresponding application of the no-damage principle. The weapons practise is integrated in the unarmed practise, starts from openings and options, and aims at disarming. This technique originates in the philosophy of “muto” (mu: without, to: sword), being the defence “with empty hands” against an armed attack.

Finally we want to give proper attention to meditation, this is the fifth theme. On the one hand meditation stimulates inner peace, on the other hand it is a reflection on life (“where?”, “whereto?” and “how?”). So, meditation is a necessary and indispensable part of our training. One becomes peacefully quiet, dissolves inner tension, and becomes able to concentrate on specific life-problems.

Growing through these 5 themes, the practitioner enhances himself, absorbs the principles, and develops the ability to neutralise an attack without causing any damage. In spite of the context of conflict (attack-defence), the development of a positive and reconciliative attitude is crucial. In this way our training brings about

a kind of general healing. Self-care, self-cultivation and self-defence are the principal targets of our practise.

### ***A HSR-aikido-class***

Before all, we want our training to be safe, physically and mentally. The requirement of non-violence and equality applies to all aspects: the techniques, the teaching, the training, and also the organisation.

Our HSR-aikido-class includes several “parts”. We start with preparation which comprises relaxation, stretching and basic coordination. The etiquette is not about formalities, but about the content and spirit of the “ritual” or the rule. General health-exercises are already a form of self-defence. Thereafter we train unarmed techniques with soft, controlled throws and joint-locks. Finally we train with - wooden - weapons (e.g. defending oneself with a stick against a sword attack). Unarmed training and training with weapons form an integrated whole. The techniques are chosen following one central aikido-principle or subject. At the beginning and ending of the class, we welcome and greet each other as an expression of gratitude for the effort, attention and time we “give” each other, thus practising mutual respect and understanding.

Heiwa Shugi Ryu-aikido also includes “the study of classics”, including among others the “31-count Jo-kata”, individually or with partner, as “kumi-jo”.

### ***The techniques***

There are some aspects we specially emphasize. The “defender” stays on his spot with an “immovable” centre, around which he guides the opponent. His hands are preferably as soft and flexible as possible, like in reiki. We don’t want to grab the opponent but rather make contact, so that the technique can be healing. Foot, elbow and hand movements need careful study, as well as shifting the centre of gravity. Ultimately we want to create some kind of a rhythm which leads to a throw or to a pin. The initial confrontation with the opponent can be hard, but we intend to dissolve this hardness and to let the opponent fall in a controlled roll. Joint-locks are guiding, aim at disrupting balance and are unharmed because they respect the natural directions of the joint. Moreover, the method of frontal and backward attack is the same, and there is little difference between an ordinary throw and a hip-throw.

We start techniques from a natural posture (“shizentai”), the feet next to each other, peacefully at ease, and only take the combat-posture (“hanmi”) by advancing one foot at the moment the attack occurs. After executing a technique, we return to this initial peaceful natural posture. The process of “attack-defence” is just a little interruption of daily life, an “exception to the rule”. After the danger is gone, the returning to and the restoring of the former peaceful resting position, is an essential part of finishing the defence. So we work from shizentai to shizentai, completing the defence-process.

We have a new weapons practise. For the same reasons as above, we start from a non-drawn sword in the scabbard and end by disarming the opponent. We pay great attention to the basics: fundamentals, breathing, energy and timing. We practise ability not as fixed exercises but as free expression of basics. We also train “serial-attacks” and we have our own ukemi-training.

### ***Our target group***

Are you interested in culture, in physical self-cultivation and in increasing your abilities away from any competitive setting, do you value self-care, non-violence and human well-being, and are you, in that view, looking for a kind of physical workout, then you can certainly consider dedicating yourself to the practise of this new aikido.

HSR-aikido offers a relative accessible and modern interpretation of martial art-practise, in an integrated whole based on the “no-damage principle”. The practise of HSR-aikido can better quality of life and can thus add value to the family and general surroundings of the practitioner. On the other hand, there are no trophies to win and our approach is modern and thus untraditional. As an inner martial art or self-care discipline, HSR-aikido can be compared to tai chi chuan or to yoga. HSR-aikido is more dynamic than these arts because it is somehow more demanding in the practise with partners and in the soft throws and falls.

The practise of HSR-aikido can also be compared to a massage, whereby the defender is the masseur, or with a pleasant and relaxing walk that restores inner balance after a busy day. Within HSR-aikido self-care is self-defence, and self-defence is self-care.

***Peter Van de Ven - january 2009***