

The Energy Body

My earliest lesson from Aikido

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I was an athletic kid, swam on the swim team, surfed in the sea and was tetherball queen in the schoolyard. In high school, while living alone in a southeast Asian city and feeling the need to learn to defend myself, I took up Taekwondo. I lived in my gut instincts, was in perpetual motion and craved sensations generated by body movement: gliding through the water, flowing with the ocean waves, delivering a powerful kick or punch.

Being unaware of KI or CHI, I was soon to learn that what I actually craved was being at one with life force energy. Soon after returning from Asia I found a truly profound path of energy.

It was in my second year of college, while struggling to figure out my purpose in life, I was compelled to pick a major among subjects that, to me, seemed dry and disembodied; then I saw an Aikido demonstration. It was love at first sight. I felt tingles in my spine as I watched bodies blend seamlessly with each other. I sensed a mysterious force and knew instantly how much I needed and wanted to learn to flow with the effortless power that these Aikido practitioners displayed. So I signed up before I had answered the ultimate question, of what to major in.

The pressure to choose a specialized subject paralyzed me with confusion and dread. The fear of being stuck in a lifeless occupation that could not supply joy turned out to be that opening for me to enter this new world of energy. Aikido was like an exciting new love, when we were together I felt alive and whole. I began to cut classes, neglect my schoolwork so I could spend as much time as possible with my latest passion. The choice was easy; in my 20-year-old brain going in one direction was a desert where I would wander in exile with my head as if untethered, doomed to be separated from the body; the other direction promised the possibility to live in an oasis of harmony and body-mind integration. Risking societal disapproval and throwing caution to the wind, I dropped out of college to devote myself full time to Aikido practice. It was a major step in learning to listen to my body.

My earliest Aikido lesson was to listen to the body. The body is real, always present in the now where the truth of one's experience is. It doesn't lie like the mind often does. The mind can time travel to the past and future, allowing thoughts and images to distort the present moment. It can dwell on painful, past memories or fret anxiously about an unknown future. Mind-based decisions made without consulting the body often lead to impassable swamps or dangerous precipices. I learned that if we are taught, as youngsters, to listen to our bodies everything and everyone can be a potential teacher. We could discern our proper direction in life and avoid misguided or harmful teachings. Our ears would perk up spontaneously, listening attentively when hearing exactly the information needed for our perilous journey into adulthood. Our body-based intuition, when developed, will discerningly separate the kernels of nourishing wheat from the useless chaff. We would avoid following wrong-headed premises, false conclusions and wasting precious time and energy.

I learned that children will get better guidance from grown-ups that have cultivated energy bodies, passing on their instinctual wisdom. They will demonstrate more by example of how to listen to the body and help the child find the right path for themselves. The right path is a path that is natural, what we are designed for. It is what, I think, George Leonard and Michael Murphy meant by the title of their book, *The Life We Are Given*. Joseph Campbell called it "follow your bliss." My own sensei, Robert Nadeau, referred to the body as a doorway. Doorway to where? I believe to be in our truest nature. Which is nowhere and everywhere. It is here where we are, where our body is – the grossest, heaviest, material aspect of our being – in the here and now. When fully present in the body we stand at a threshold that automatically opens to a multidimensional reality of increasingly subtler levels of energy and refined awareness.

Aikido is the art of non-resistance. As the founder, Morihei Ueshiba or O'Sensei says, "...as it is non-resistant is always victorious." This process of ever-increasing subtlety and refinement is not forced or achieved through effort or struggle. It is by the realization of our true nature, what O'Sensei calls Love. The first step toward realizing that our nature is Universal Love is by listening to the body.