

## **Suffolk Institute for Eastern Studies**

**Founder / Head Master Instructor:** *Howard Pashenz, Ph.D. 6th Dan*

### **Martial Arts Need Not Be Violent**



*During thirty odd years of aikido practice, I have seen many changes in my attitude concerning self defense. Initially I felt weak and helpless and wanted to be able to protect myself effectively, while doing the least permanent injury to my would be attacker. Aikido offered options for throwing and pinning without breaking; to inflict a great deal of pain in the process, if so including the desired*

My first ten years of practice focused on learning to apply different techniques effectively, with as much speed and power as I could muster. I vividly remember the statement Koichi Tohei made at the conclusion of my Shodan examination; "Now your learning will first begin", At first it didn't make much sense to me. I thought I would just continue polishing and perfecting what I had learned. During the next two decades of practice and teaching, however, I found my perspective changing. My focus of attention gradually shifting from attack and defense to observing what I was feeling and sensing while going through techniques without much thought. They had become habits by this time; the body knew what to do without my conscious direction. I became much more relaxed, which allowed me to move more quickly and with less effort. I would easily visualize a fine of attack so had to move only inches in order to feel safe. Since Aikido is a circular art, strength to stop an attack is unnecessary. Instead, the on of attack is joined, then led so the attacker is unbalanced and helpless. 'Me situation changes when the attacker is no longer a threat; and many other options become possible.

When the attacker becomes weak and helpless (in an unbalanced posture), there is much more opportunity to respond in a kinder fashion. This is exactly what I had been searching for without being consciously aware of it. As long as an attacker is a threat, counter-violence seems an appropriate method of self protection. Injuring the attacker is certainly a way of preserving one's own skin. And one could quietly gloat at the

"vigilante justice ) ; the attacker got his "just deserts". My most recent practice has focused on attacker's balance. It is quite difficult to launch a viable attack from an unbalanced position. There seems to be two ways of breaking balance. The first has to do with the obvious fact that human beings are bipeds. Stepping in to attack means a strong balanced position along an imaginary line passing through both feet. But an imaginary line at a right angle to this first line, is the direction of weakness. If pushed or pulled in the direction of this line, there is no leg to brace in order to resist. Avoiding the initial attack, then pushing the attacker in the direction of "no balance", resolves the situation with the attacker thrown to the Wind. The second method of unbalancing has to do with the form of the body. Balance seems strongest when attention is focused at the center of gravity; the hara, below the navel. It is relatively simple to enter diagonally (irimi) behind an attacker, then place a hand on his lower spine as a fulcrum. Pulling on the collar or head, with the other hand, creates a lever and fulcrum action, with a great deal of power because of the mechanical advantage.

What I am suggesting, as an alternative to counter-violence, is attacking balance rather than the physical integrity of the opponent's body. I believe this can add a dimension to martial arts based on a humanistic approach towards one's fellow man. It is consistent with the Buddhist position that an attacker is not bad or evil; but ignorant of the fact that we are all interrelated, and share the same life force. It is also a great deal of fun.