

Mind & Body Unification

Understanding Mind & Body Unification

Principles of the Mind

Principles one and four of the above list are principles of the mind. This means that the mind is the primary focus of unification relative to these principles: keep one point, and extend ki. Principles two and four are principles of the body.

Keep One Point

The One Point is not a physical place in the typical sense of the word, but rather a point within the body upon which the calm mind may focus. It is really a state of mind. People often talk about the One Point being 2–4 inches (some measure it as precisely as 10 centimeters) below the navel. Such attempts at objectively describing a state of mind miss the point (no pun intended). By calmly focusing the mind on the lower abdomen, one becomes centered in the truest sense of the word. Physical movements, such as walking, are much more coordinated, while at the same time being very

The Four Basic Principles of Mind & Body Unification

1. Settle Down
2. Control Relaxation
3. Keep One-Point
4. Let Your Ki Flow

powerful. One may think of the One Point as the center of the universe. Since the universe is infinite, there is no single “center”, but rather infinite centers. Thus, each person’s One Point is the center of his or her universe. This universal mind/body centering creates a very powerful and calm feeling, which is very conducive to performing aikido. There are several tests which may be used to demonstrate whether a student has developed the ability to keep One Point, such as standing in hanmi (normal aikido stance) and being pushed gently by a partner on the upper chest, shoulder, and small of the back. If One Point is being maintained, it will be relatively difficult to move the person being tested.

The position is maintained by simply holding your place, not by resisting through pushing back.

Letting Your Ki Flow

Ki is a Japanese word which translates to, among other things, energy, spirit and power. In aikido, extending ki means extending energy. However, it does not mean to simply push with physical force. Rather it is a state of mind used to align the body to permit movement in a unified and calmly concentrated fashion. The classic illustration of ki extension is the Unbendable Arm test. The arm is extended in neither a rigid nor limp manner, but with a feeling of lively energy coursing through the arm from the One Point and extending out to infinity through the finger tips. This mental image produces an arm which is soft and pliable to the touch, but which is very difficult to bend. This feeling of dynamic energy extension is used in all aikido techniques. Without it, throws quickly become exercises in muscular tension, largely dependent on mere mechanical advantage and bulk.

Principles of the Body

The remaining principles, relax completely and keep weight underside, are principles of the body. although the mind initiates the “body feel”, the primary focus of these principles is the state of the body.

Control Relaxation

This is probably the most misunderstood of the four principles of mind and body unification. Complete relaxation in the sense in which it is applied in aikido is not the relaxation of a lump of jello, that of the “dead” relaxation. It is instead the sense of a body full of energy without tension. Complete relaxation goes beyond simple muscular relaxation into mind/body relaxation. A calm mind naturally produces a calm body. Removing stress from the body greatly enhances freedom of movement, which is so necessary in aikido.

Keep Weight Underside

With all objects, weight naturally falls in the direction it is pulled by gravity, namely down. In human beings, however, it is possible to influence the manner in which the body “carries” its weight. The human body is not solid in the strict sense of the term, but is instead fluid. As water moves within a glass, so

may the parts of the body “float” in relationship to one another. If one concentrates on the weight of the body being underside, or in the lower portion of the body, one finds that the body is very stable. if one concentrates on the upper body, of example the top of the head, the body becomes weight upper side and, as a result, unstable. When moving in aikido, it is important to keep your weight underside. This happens naturally if you are calm in mind and body, whereas tension automatically makes the body weight upperside.

How to Learn & Practice the Four Principles

Open Your Mind

There is a famous story about the student who approached a zen master seeking the path to enlightenment. The student questioned everything the master told him, until finally one day the master invited him for tea. As the student held out his cup, the master poured in the tea until the cup overflowed. “The cup is full!” exclaimed the student. “Exactly,” said the master, “you must empty your cup to accept more tea.”

Attend Regularly

As with most things in life, regular practice is required to

achieve any meaningful level of change in your ability to remain calm in stressful situations, and to have some success in applying ki principles in daily life. Change takes time and practice.

Keep Training in Its Proper Perspective

Particularly in the beginning, don’t place too much importance on the speed at which you progress. Don’t expect miracles to happen. It takes time to develop and understanding of the relationship between the Ki principles and events in daily life. In time, you will see improvement, so be patient. Remember, the expert was once a beginner too.

Following the Four Principles

The good news is that it is easy to follow the four principles. If you follow one principle, the other are taken care of automatically. for example, if you keep one point, you are naturally relaxed, weight underside and extending ki. The bad news is that if you break one of the principles, the others are lost as well, for the moment at least. for example, if you are tense, you will naturally become weight upper side. All is not lost, however, for you can regain your composure in a moment, regaining all four principles in the process.