

THE LIFE CHANGING ART

By Chad F.

In a world where media influences almost every facet of people's lives, participation in a martial art can be seen as a saving grace by instilling much needed benefits into a population bombarded with outside opinions and influences. Aikido in particular is a wonderful martial art because it has benefits on all levels of a person's being and doesn't just target certain areas to develop.

The positive and beneficial aspects of Aikido are many. Not only is it a great physical exercise, strengthening core muscles and increasing flexibility as well as having internal benefits

much like yoga practice, but it also has great mental and emotional benefits. These benefits can help everyone in their day to day lives, but can be much more valuable to youths.

Aikido, almost more than any other martial art, can clear your mind of many of the impulses to cause conflict in your life. One of the key principles of aikido is blending. In physical terms, blending means trying not to fight force with force which creates conflict. Mentally speaking, it is much the same. Trying not to conflict with people during heated conversations can be quite difficult but after even a little bit of time practicing aikido you will find that you naturally 'blend' and find non-conflicting solutions to many issues.

Lack of self-confidence is a huge issue felt with almost everyone at some point but is particularly absent from people in the tweens and teens. Many magazines, movies and television programs only show images that sell what they are promoting and people buy into the propaganda. It is a classic example of an outside influence defining our opinions. One of the mental aspects of any martial art is the increase in self-confidence and aikido is no different. Just because someone doesn't look like the model on the cover of *Vogue* doesn't mean that they can't be confident in who they are.

On the other end of the spectrum from confidence is ego. Unlike most martial arts, aikido is non-competitive. What that means is that there are no tournaments or competitions to build an individual's ego up above someone else's. Instead, aikido is an art of becoming better than yourself and not better than someone else.

Practicing aikido often, all these benefits become yours for the taking and you may not even notice it! But guaranteed those close to you will notice a positive change in you. Whether you stand up for yourself in a firm yet non-conflicting manner or you find yourself taking less stock in other people's opinions of you and are more content to be yourself then aikido is doing for you what it has done for so many people before. It really would not be an understatement to say that Aikido changes lives, and it can change yours.