

O-Sensei Ueshiba Morihei – The Founder of Modern Aikido



As a young man, Ueshiba Morihei (born December 14, 1882) had an unusual interest in the martial arts, philosophy, and religion. The environment of his youth, one of religious discipline and tradition, had an enormous effect on the course of his later life.

In the year of 1898, Ueshiba left his home village outside Osaka and traveled to Tokyo to set up a small stationary business. While in Tokyo, he sought instruction in the martial arts. He actively investigated dozens of arts, but was eventually drawn to specialize in three: the sword style known as *Yagyū Shinkage Ryu*, the staff style known as *Hozoin Ryu*, and *Tenjin Shinyō jujutsu*.

The Russo-Japanese War (1904) provided Ueshiba with a real situation to develop himself in accord to the principles he had learned during his martial arts training. Ueshiba the soldier spent most of the war years in the harsh climate of northern Manchuria and, by the end of the war, his health had deteriorated considerably. With characteristic vigour, he regained his vitality by way of long hours spent in outdoor labour. Soon after, Ueshiba was engaged by the government to lead a group of immigrants to Hokkaido (the northern island of Japan).



Aikido Founder

Another adventurous young man, Takeda Sokaku, head of the Takeda family, also made the move to Hokkaido. Ueshiba and Takeda met in 1905, and Ueshiba began his study of Daitu Ryu Aikijujutsu under Takeda Sensei. In addition, he continued to practice the other arts he had learned in Tokyo, particularly kenjutsu and jojutsu.

Travelling home to visit his ailing father, Ueshiba met a man name Deguchi Onisaburo, leader of the *Omoto* religion. Ueshiba was very impressed with Deguchi, and subsequently became one of his disciples. Although this commitment led him to further develop his mind, his martial arts studies were not neglected. In 1925, Ueshiba organized his own style of Aikijujutsu, one that was more in line with his own needs for spiritual and physical development.

During the next decade, Ueshiba's students (Shioda, Tomiki, Mochizuki, and others) were active in building a foundation for present-day Aikido. Ueshiba, however, was interested in seeking the true martial way, the essential spirit of Budo. In his search he left the dojo to work at farming. Through his closeness with nature and continued training, he tried to unify his spiritual and physical being. In 1950, after the Second World War, Ueshiba returned to the Tokyo dojo to continue teaching Aikido.

Continuing the evolution of martial "arts" to "ways" - from *Bugei* to *Budo* - Ueshiba Sensei diligently applied himself to the reworking of the techniques he had been taught, and synthesized them into a form that taught harmony rather than violence. In this way he was able to integrate his spiritual beliefs and his great technical proficiency in the Art.

Ueshiba proclaimed that the true Budo way (the way of the warrior) was the way of peaceful reconciliation. He dedicated himself to the design of an art that would teach technical prowess and strength, and commitment to the self discipline needed for personal growth. He named the new art for "Aikido".

Ueshiba Sensei continued to instruct until his death in 1968, earning the respect and admiration of all who met him. Before his death he received a government award as the designer of modern Aikido, and general acclaim for his efforts to bring peace and enlightenment to all.

As his concern and energy touched the lives of the students he worked with, several Aikido styles have evolved. The most notable of these styles are *Yoshinkai*, *Tomiki-ryu*, *Aikikai*, and the recent *Shinsin Toitsu-ryu*. The founders of these styles were all dedicated men committed to the precepts set down by Master Ueshiba. Each developed certain elements of O-Sensei's teachings, so each style differs from the others while maintaining an essential sameness.