

Sitting meditation (shikantaza).

What is the basic state of mind we are seeking to develop, or uncover, in our practice of aikido?

A present centered, calm, 'open-focused' state of awareness that is open to being and engaging with 'what is' and has relinquished it's resistance and reactivity to experience.

Our intention in aikido is to be present with what is occurring and 'work with' to the most of our ability. Not because of religious, dogmatic or idealistic belief systems telling us that this should be our goal but because we have understood through repeated honest feedback on the mat that reactive patterns, in the form of defense or attack, are simply inefficient ways of solving conflict (and of relating generally!).

Attack and defense are forms of resistance that cause us to separate off from what is occurring. Informationally speaking, we then become heavily blinkered if not essentially blind, to what is actually taking place in the moment, and our consequent actions are like blind thrusts in the dark. We react instead of responding intelligently and appropriately to the demands of the situation.

When we 'just sit' in meditation, we let go of all mental postures. It could be described, from an aikido perspective, as the ultimate practice of 'non-resistance'.

Everything is allowed to be what it is: our bodily sensations, our feelings, our thoughts, the noises from the environment...

all resistance to our experience is dropped, all arguments, all goals, all ideas about what we are doing or not doing... everything is allowed to be exactly as it is, moment by moment by moment...

... and straight away we are confronted with restlessness, impatience, doubting, thinking, thinking, thinking...

or we pass into distraction, daydreaming, dullness and drowsiness.

Just as with Aikido, we do not resist this, we do not fight with our mind, and we do not run from it. Again and again... we simply allow it to be as it is....we simply notice what is the case without judgement and let it go.

Sitting meditation in this way, 'just sitting', is not the same therefore as 'concentration' or 'contemplation' oriented practices. In the first we collect our attention by concentrating on an object and in the second we dwell deeply on an issue or question, open to the possibility of direct insight into the matter. Both of these practices are valuable and certainly have their place at times.

However the invitation in 'just sitting' (shikantaza) is to let go of all mental postures and goals and to simply 'be'.

Nothing is better for a man than to be without anything, having no ascetism, no theory, no practice. When he is without anything, he is with everything.

Abu Yazid Al-Bistami.

For more information as to this form of practice I can fully recommend the following:

Adyashanti True Meditation (book and CD)

Other valuable resources from a superb martial artist:

Peter Ralston The Book Of Not Knowing.
Pursuing Consciousness
Zen Body Being.

Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros.