

Training Across Borders

Opening Speech on the occasion of the International Aikido Seminar in Zürich
July 16th-23d, 2005,

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Dear Guests from far away,
from Jordan, Israel, Kuwait, England, from Liechtenstein, from other parts of Switzerland, dear lecturers in our seminar, dear fellow Aikidoka.

Kurt Bartholet, our Sensei and the organizer of this event has asked me to say a couple of words of welcome and introduction at the beginning of this week of Aikido training, seminars, lectures, explorations and events, which is happening under the theme "Training Across Borders".

In one way or the other, we have all come here, with the goal and intention to go beyond our limits:

Certainly, this seminar is about crossing national borders by training with people from other countries and cultures, but it is also about transcending limits in a broader sense.

It is also about transcending the **limits of our technical, mental and physical and in the end spiritual possibilities**, through intensive Aikido training, a proven and effective martial art of coordination and communication.

It is also about transcending **limits of thinking**, of perceptions and preconceived notions regarding people from other countries, cultures, languages and religions, about building bridges, tolerance and respect by opening up and blending, and in full awareness, see what evolves.

It is also about expanding the **limits of our knowledge** by listening to lectures on such varied but very timely themes as the mutual creation of religions and communities, non-substance abuse in today's society, neurological aspects of movement and consciousness, and some perspectives on the Swiss history of neutrality in the last 200 years.

And for some of you, mainly our guests from abroad, it is also about expanding the **limits of geographical experience** by hiking and exploring our fabulous Swiss mountains and alpine landscapes.

As you see, a lot of borders to be crossed, a lot of experiences to be made and a lot of new things to learn.

A lot of possibilities for enrichment, for adding intensity, complexity and joy within the brief period of the week of life ahead of us.

Why is crossing and transcending borders important?

Because if we do not learn to open up and blend with the energy of our partners and our surroundings, as Aikido teaches us, we will inevitably be controlled by, instead of being able to constructively deal with the situation.

Our people and our country, Switzerland currently is in such a situation politically, having to define its relationship with the European countries around us in forthcoming elections.

Some of you come from regions of the world with ongoing conflict that has been going on for centuries.

And if each of us is looking at his or her own personal relationships soberly and realistically, we surely will find lots of room for improvement in terms of opening up and blending, for constructively dealing with conflict and creating harmony.

Crossing borders is important, because if we are not able to cross our inner borders of preconceived notions, if we are not willing to relax and learn from our adversaries, partners, ukes, toris in our life, we will never get out of the vicious circle of intolerance, hate, pain, conflict, killing and destruction that are so much part of human existence.

Most of us practice Aikido, because we have found that it is not only a powerful and effective martial art, but also a way to transcend, to go beyond borders, an alternative way to deal with conflict and aggression.

As the name Aikido actually says, a possible way –do- to blend personal internal and external life energy –ki- with –Ai-, the creative, loving spirit of the universe.

For many a realistically minded or even cynical contemporary person, this may seem to be a noble but totally farfetched and unrealistic goal.

But when looking at the sorry state of this world of ours, isn't every little step in the direction of harmony, openness and learning not only worth it, but an absolute necessity, if we care to survive as a species?

Each Aikido technique starts with a conflict situation as the source of it all and shows and makes us experience practical ways of harmonious resolution.

Aikido and especially this multifaceted seminar provide a safe and effective platform to learn from each other via a common system of techniques, rituals and languages.

Learning and crossing borders is often not easy at all. When we are unwilling to relax and let go of old structures of thought and behaviour, it often involves pain. Sometimes, pain is the fastest way to learn, but often not really necessary.

Aikido teaches us that relaxation is a prerequisite for optimal energy flow and focussed strength, a seeming paradox, until we experience it for ourselves.

Aikido is also about energy extension, another way of going beyond one's limits to reach others.

It's principles can also be extended and used in other areas beyond the martial arts:

In individual and group therapy, team building, organizational development, management and even in politics and strategy.

Maybe, in the next few days, even some new ideas regarding the application of Aikido principles evolve and in this sense, I welcome you all again on behalf of Aikido Zürich and the Zürich peoples health community.

We hope that your combined experiences during the coming week will be inspiring and rewarding, that new friendships and relationships will be built and lost of creative processes will be catalysed.

May this be a starting point for all of us, to expand our horizons and cross even more borders in the future!

Thank you.