

Stepping Into the Streams of Aikido and LET: A Brief Review

By Charlotte Hatch, ITP Mastery Teacher

The founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba or O Sensei, (1882-1969), refined his art throughout his life. By the 1930s, he had a vibrant Aikibudo dojo in Tokyo and many people, including important members of Japanese society and the military, trained with him. However, war was on the horizon, and O Sensei believed that WWII would cause much death and carnage and end badly for Japan. Wanting no part of it, he left Tokyo just before the war began and moved to a farm in Iwama, 100 miles north. O Sensei dedicated the rest of his life to farming, prayer and the cultivation of peace and harmony on earth through Aikido, the way of harmony with the energy of the universe, the Art of Peace.*



In the mid-1960s, Robert Nadeau went to Japan to study Judo. After meeting O Sensei, he changed plans. Finding a place to live with his wife only a block from Hombu Aikido Dojo in Tokyo, he immersed himself in the study of Aikido. O Sensei had returned to Tokyo and was leading impromptu classes and seminars, and offering amazing demonstrations for the public. O Sensei had something special. The energy that emanated from him was palpable. The whole dojo vibrated whenever he was there. This energy changed Nadeau forever. O Sensei gave Nadeau a scroll that read, “Teach the Aikido That Cannot Be Seen With the Human Eye.” When he returned to the USA, he began to do just that.

When Nadeau first began teaching Aikido to Michael Murphy, George Leonard and other members of the Esalen staff, George said that it seemed as though he really wanted to teach them energy awareness instead of Aikido. But the students begged Nadeau to get mats so they could roll and practice the “real thing.” Nadeau eventually did purchase mats and classes in Aikido commenced.

However, Nadeau kept energy awareness in his curriculum and this part of the training fascinated George. He began to organize the energy work into exercises that anyone, regardless of physical prowess, could do. With Nadeau Sensei’s blessing, George named his exercises Leonard Energy Training (LET) and he began to teach the training throughout the world. (See below for a description of a LET exercise.)

George incorporated many Aikido principles into LET. Three of the most prominent ones are centering, flow and non-resistance.

Centering

“A good stance and posture reflect a proper state of mind.”
– O Sensei

“A centered body leads to a centered life.”
– George Leonard

Balancing and centering is the most basic practice in both Aikido and LET. Life experiences continually throw us off. The more practice we have in bringing our bodies, minds, hearts and souls back to center, the less often we make decisions from an unbalanced place.

Flow

“Each day of human life contains joy and anger, pain and pleasure, darkness and light, growth and decay. Each moment is etched with nature’s grand design—do not try to deny or oppose the cosmic order of things.”

– O Sensei

“Take the hit as a gift. Challenges can be energizing. Don’t deny the existence of negative happenings. Use them! Even some of the shocks and blows that you experience can help you achieve your potential if you know how to handle them.

– George Leonard

Keeping yourself present and open to the flow of energy in your life, even negative or challenging energy, enables you to use it for creation.

Nonresistance

“The Art of Peace is the principle of nonresistance. Because it is nonresistant, it is victorious from the beginning. Those with evil intentions or contentious thoughts are instantly vanquished. The Art of Peace is invincible because it contends with nothing.”
– O Sensei

“*What do you do when somebody pushes you?* I have asked this question to...some 50,000 individuals. In every case, the first answer has been ‘Push Back.’ ...The problem is, such a response leads to a very limited number of outcomes—win, lose or stalemate. ...If you win, someone else loses. Losing doesn’t feel very good. And a stalemate is a big waste of time. It could be said that the health of an individual or an organization is generally directly proportionate to the number of perceived options at its command.”
– George Leonard

The principle of non-resistance, or blending, is fundamental to the study and practice of Aikido. Blending is both a physical and a psychological action. As an attack comes toward you, you move physically toward it, turning at the last moment to stand next to your attacker, facing in the same direction as him or her, and seeing the world from his or her viewpoint. You accept the incoming energy while keeping yourself and your attacker safe from harm. When you see the world as it is from another’s perspective, you gain an understanding of who he or she is: a person with a past, a present and a future. Without giving up your path—your past, present and future—you can find another way or option that leads to harmony.

While Aikidoists practice blending with physical attacks every day, LET uses physical blending as a metaphor for verbal blending. We all encounter verbal opposition at times and have reached that place where opposition brings a project to a standstill. By blending with your opposition, the energy in a situation can continue to flow. The end result may not be exactly what either participant had in mind at the start, but the combination of their viewpoints will produce something new and magical in the world.

Michael Murphy and George Leonard have said that, as dire as the future looks now to some, humankind is on the cusp of an evolutionary leap forward. The study of energy—centering, flow and non-resistance—will surely help us develop those “extraordinary” capacities that we are all heir to.

We can give much gratitude to O Sensei, Robert Nadeau and George Leonard for embodying energy studies and making them available to us in the many Aikido dojos throughout the world and in the LET workshops given by ITPI everywhere.

*To learn more about O Sensei’s process of transformation and his journey to becoming an Aikido master, see Nadeau’s article [“O Sensei Revisited Workshop Concepts.”](#)



LET Blending Exercise: An Alternative Way of Dealing with Verbal Attacks

This exercise shows how you can receive energy from another and get into harmony without resisting or giving up your point of view. As George wrote, “In this exercise, you’ll have an opportunity to get the *feel* of blending through bodily movement under pressure.”

You stand in a balanced, centered way, holding one arm out in front at chest height, elbow bent horizontally. Your partner approaches you from the front and grabs ahold of the lower part of the arm you’ve raised and pushes gently toward you, using his/her body to represent an opposing point of view. Balancing and centering, while keeping energy in your arm, you turn yourself so that you’re standing beside your partner instead of facing him/her. Now your partner is still holding your arm, but both of you are facing the same way and you’re seeing the world from your partner’s angle. Of course, you can return to your original position any time you want, should you desire to keep the opposition going. But, you’ve seen the world from your partner’s perspective and the two of you can proceed together.

Here’s a somewhat silly example of how verbal blending might go. A couple wants to go on vacation. The wife wants the beach, the husband the mountains. A discussion begins, and pretty soon it seems the evening will be spent arguing about where to go to have fun sometime in the future. Somebody’s got to step up. The wife balances and centers herself. After taking the time for this, she sees her husband anew. She admires his fascination with the beauty of the mountains and his love of skiing, his athleticism, or maybe his sheer determination to ski well. She looks at the mountains through his eyes and finds excitement, challenge and beauty. He thinks of her in a swimsuit. They’re moving toward harmony, toward an evening spent searching the world for a place where the mountains meet the beach, toward having fun in the present while planning fun in the future.