

# "The Art of Aikido" Video Series

□ Reviewed by Dr. Taietsu Unno

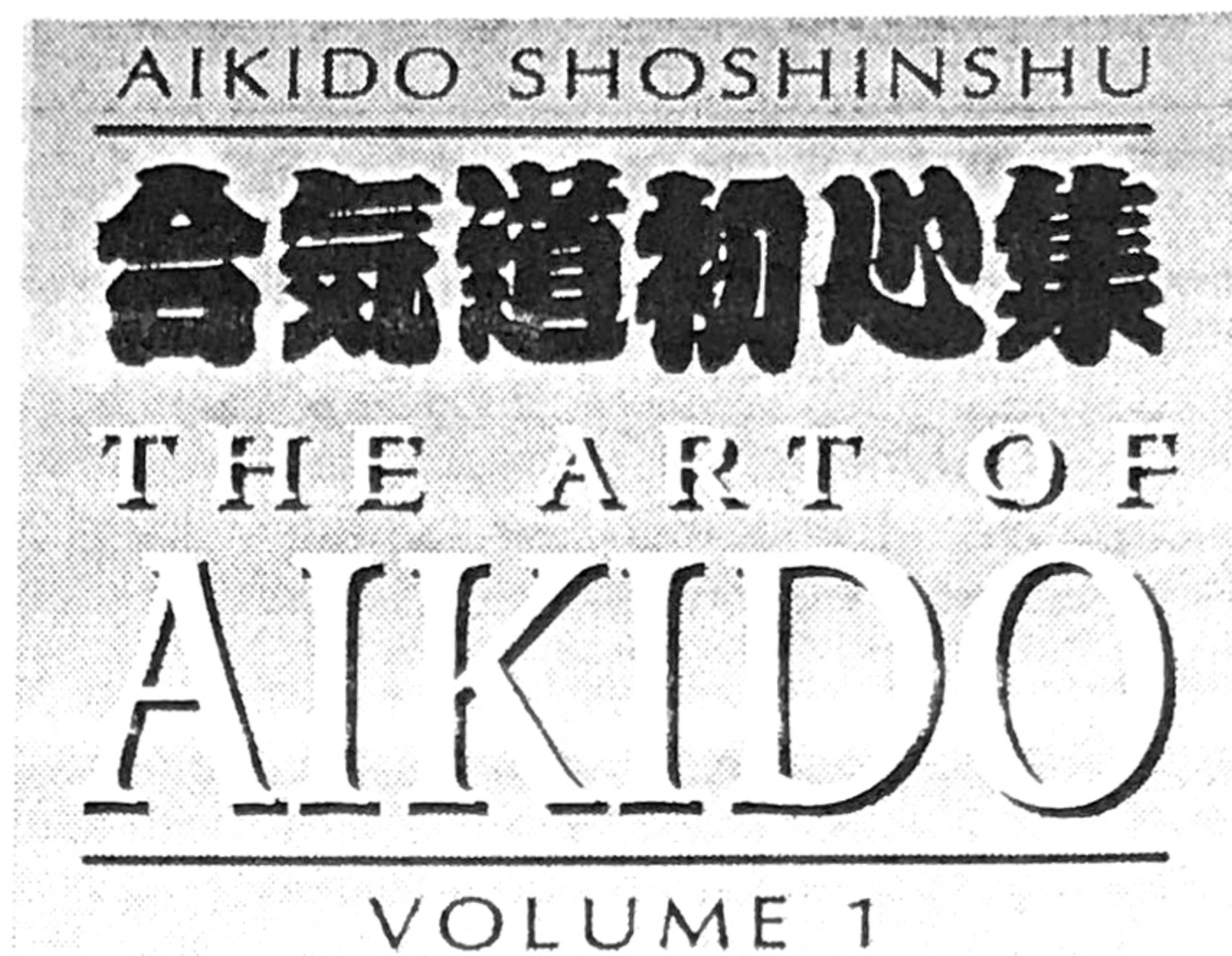
**T**he Art of Aikido," a nine volume, nine hour video series by Kensho Furuya of the Aikido Center of Los Angeles, is an excellent introduction to this non-violent spiritual form of martial art founded by Morihei Ueshiba. Recommended for both beginning and advanced students of *aikido*, Furuya Sensei demonstrates the multiple defensive techniques against attacks, holds and weapons with patience and understanding of the subtleties of *aikido* movement based on centering, *ki*-energy and the opponent's strength. His lectures, interspersed among the dynamic spherical motions of the art, help clarify the spiritual and religious dimensions of this art articulated by Grandmaster Morihei Ueshiba.

In the West, the Asian martial arts are called "self-defense," using violence and lethal power as the selling points. While this caters to macho culture, it goes against the essential spirit of traditional martial arts which is the training of the mind and body to attain the realizations that there is no "self," dogmatic and static, to defend (Kant called the notion of self a convenient fiction). This means that real training in a martial art cultivates discipline, patience, reduces ego-inflation and minimizes arrogance, resulting in the suppleness of body and magnanimity of mind which enables a person to realize his or her fullest potential as a human being. The ideal of martial arts, whether *judo*, *karate*, *kung-fu*, or others, strives for such a realization, but among them *aikido* is unique.

Unlike other martial arts, *aikido* does not teach any form of striking, kicking or maiming of an opponent, nor does it sponsor any kind of competitive tournaments. It only teaches defensive movements, consisting of centered and balanced spherical motions, which deflect attacks and leads the attacker's thrusts to follow its own course, off balance and destined to fall. Such circular, fluid movements are based on *ki*-energy coming from the center of gravity within and not on brute strength which blocks any rhythmic flow.

*Aikido* does have promotional tests for various ranks, but as Furuya Sensei's tapes emphasize the purpose is not simply to assess technical proficiency and expertise but also to look at the person being tested for the human qualities of sincerity, effort, patience and selfless devotion to the art. Proper and respectful bowing is part of the testing procedure.

Kensho Furuya's introductory tapes on the "Art of Aikido" show glimpses of the spiritual core of martial arts, for he himself combines both aspects: his many years of study under the leading *aikido* teachers in the United States and Japan and his involvement with religion as an ordained priest in the Soto Zen tradition. Thus, while the techniques demonstrated by Furuya Sensei are instructive (they should not be attempted without the guidance of a qualified teacher), the tapes are also informative and enlightening for anyone wishing to learn more



about the spirituality that has commonalities with the arts of tea ceremony, floral arrangement, *haiku* poetry and *sumie* painting.

The "Art of Aikido" is a nine volume set of comprehensive instructional video tapes on the fundamentals of *aikido* by Kensho Furuya of the Aikido Center of Los Angeles. The tapes are produced and distributed by Unique Publications, 4201 Vanowen Pl., Burbank, CA 91505 (Tel: 1-800-332-3330). For further information on the video tapes, seminars and instruction in *aikido*, please contact the Aikido Center of Los Angeles, 940 East 2nd Street, #7, Los Angeles, CA 90012 or call (213) 687-3673. □

*Dr. Taietsu Unno, is a Jill Ker Conway Professor of Religion at Smith College, Massachusetts. Since 1971, he has been teaching courses on Buddhism and on Japanese culture in relation to religion, aesthetics and the arts. He is the translator of The Spirit of Aikido by Kisshomaru Ueshiba, published by Kodansha International (1984). Dr. Unno is a graduate of the University of California, Berkeley and received his M.A. and Ph. D. degrees in Buddhist Studies from Tokyo University. He is a black belt student of aikido, as well as an ordained minister of Shin Buddhism.*